

ALFRED  
**HITCHCOCK's**  
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

November, 1984 \$1.75



# A Place To Rest

by T. Robin

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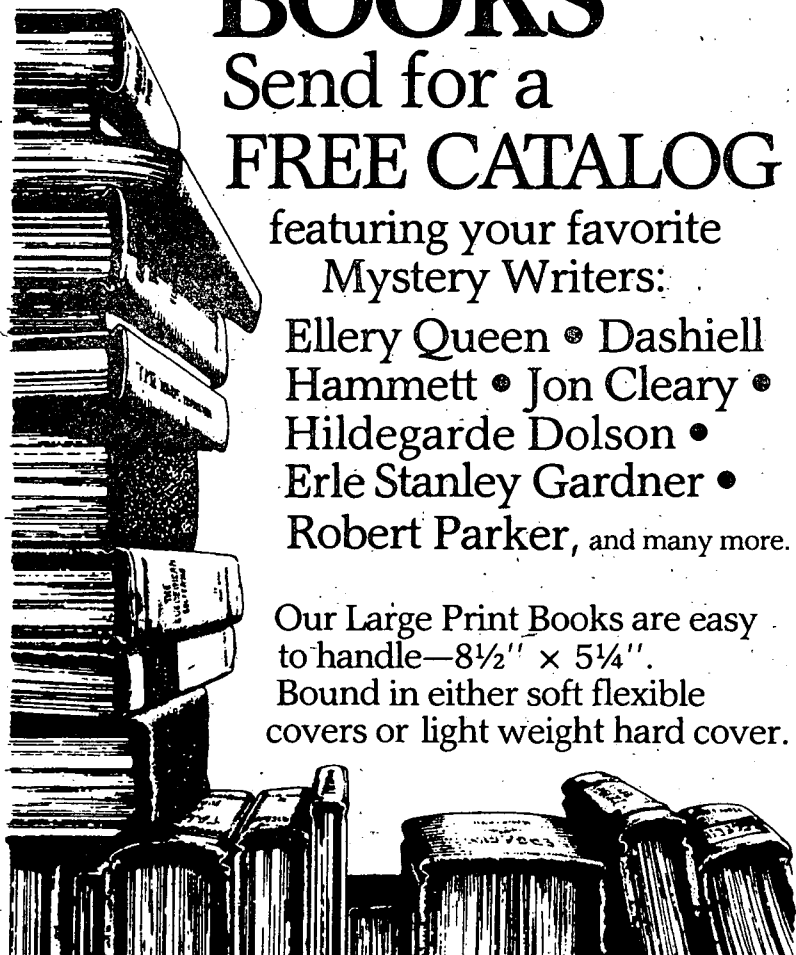
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# EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

**T**he hint of autumn in the air suggests all kinds of time-honored traditions, football games, for one, and for another—especially on frosty evenings when the wind is howling around—the approach of Halloween. To mark the season, we've assembled some stories in the current issue that have to do with Halloween-like matters.

Starting with Rob Kantner's "A Place To Rest," about which we intend to say very little, in order not to give the story away. Kantner most frequently writes about private investigator Ben Perkins, as many of you know, but this time around he has undertaken something different and as surprising in its own way as his earlier story, "The Last Day" (AHMM, May 1984).

Jo Anne Howell's "The Double Invasion" follows handily

upon her first tale for AHMM, "Inverse Prediction" in the July issue. Those of you who enjoyed that story might correctly expect something of the same sort from her this time around.

Dan A. Sproul has cooked up a delightful tale for us in "Sidney's Curse" that combines the horseracing world about which he has written before ("The Legacy," February) with a curse visited upon a horseplayer, and Thomasina Weber's "Touch Me Not" deals with the Other Side of the other world. Ann F. Woodward's newest Lady Aoi story, set in twelfth century Japan, invokes mist and magic; Donald Olson's "The Winning Hand" involves a particularly eerie image; and this issue's Mystery Classic is a good ghost story.

And then there's this month's Mysterious Photograph . . .

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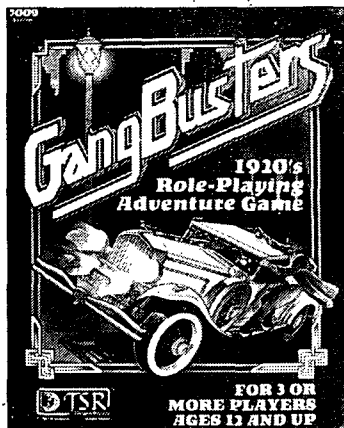
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FICTION

# A Place To Rest

by T. Robin Kantner

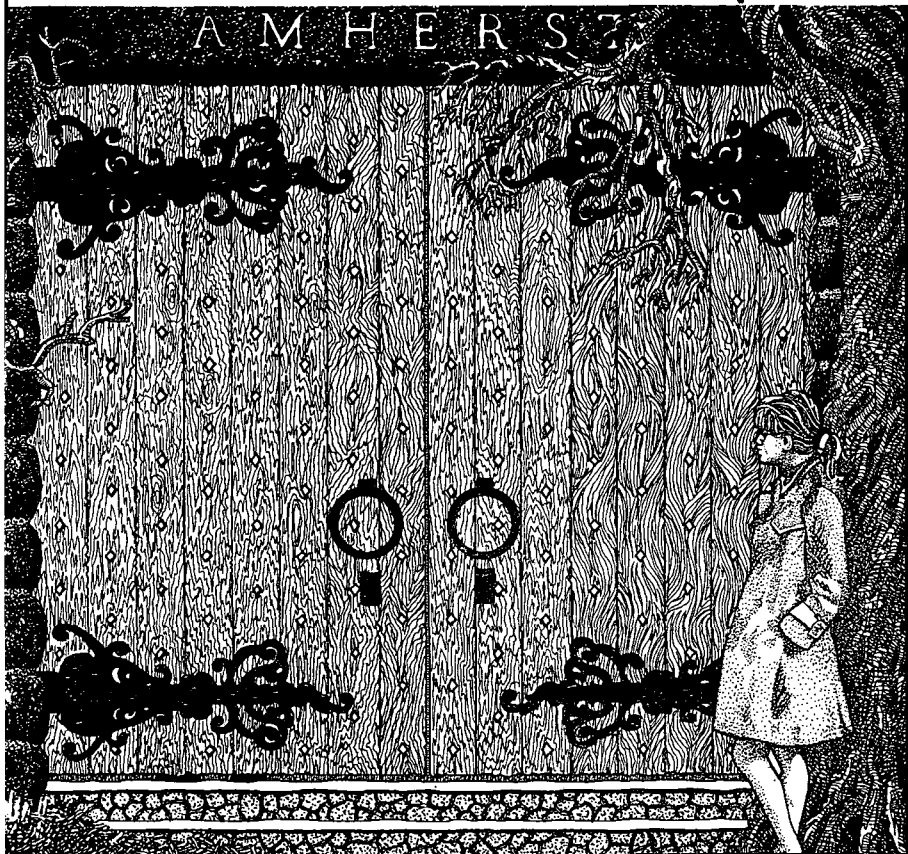
**H**e let me call him Jake. It was something of a miracle, in the year 1911, to be six years old and permitted to call an adult, particularly one so terrifically old, by his first name.

There were other miracles. He took me fishing for crappie and perch on the bank of the Sac River near my father's farm southeast of Amherstburg. He took me hiking through the fields and wandering through the forests, and he talked to me for hours on end.

*Illustration by Kurt Wallace*

Though as the century progressed I forgot his face, I never forgot his form: tall, bull-like, hard-striding, with thick gray hair spilling down over his shoulders and held down by a canvas hat. He wore a loose, off-white shortsleeved shirt and heavy, baggy denim pants over his knee-length rubber boots. He always carried a big stick, and he loved to sing in a high, strong tenor, chin lifted to the breeze, a big grin on his ancient, leathered face.

Those were the strong, vivid



memories. There was one more, fainter and sketchier, that only came to me on odd occasions: in the black hours that followed my first wife's death in 1929; when I was delirious from a leg wound after being shot up over Hannover in 1943; when I was reviving from anesthetic after my prostate operation in 1972. It also crept in, quite frequently, I believed, as one of those short-subject dreams you have just after falling asleep or just before waking up: the times when you know you had a

dream, but can't recall what it was.

In that dream, I walked with Jake. The dirt road was deep and rutted; tall fields of corn rose, glowing in the sunlight, on both sides of us; redwing blackbirds clustered on the single telegraph line high above us. He asked me a question—issued an invitation—and I agreed.

Next, we were at the top of a bluff. The land sloped away on all sides, rolling in squares of green and yellow. Clumps of



trees darkened the ground like the shadows of clouds. The Sac River wound away far to our right, and the village of Amherstburg showed in vertical blocks of white and red to our left.

We stood next to a huge, gray, granite building. Jake rubbed a leathery hand on the smooth stone. He said many things, but the one that stuck in my mind down through the years was, "This is my place to rest, Earle. This is where I'm gonna live."

Then, shortly after that, he was gone. I'd never told anyone about him, so no one told me what happened to him, and I never asked. I didn't give it much thought. At six, new miracles come along to replace the old ones. For nearly three-quarters of a century I hardly thought of Jake—except for those dreams—and I didn't even know his full name.

**I** was born Earle Oberlin Casella, Jr., on my father's farm in Polataw Township, James Madison County, southeast of the village of Amherstburg, on the last day of June, 1905. My life, being unexceptional, could be summed up by leafing, as very old men frequently do, through a short book of photographs.

Here I am graduating from

high school in 1922 and, on the next page, from Northwestern College in 1926. Here's the official portrait of Earle and Grace Casella on the occasion of our wedding in June, 1927. This one is of me accepting my Bachelor of Law Degree at the University of Cincinnati in 1929. That small torn black ribbon around the upper arm of my suit signified the fact that I'd just buried my wife, who died in labor.

This is the Terrible Trio: me and my first two law partners, Harry and Chas, in our crummy office, probably taken sometime in '31. Here's the first color shot in the book: the wedding photo of Earle and Katherine Casella, Memorial Day weekend, 1935. If she looks like a kid here, it's because she was only twenty, ten years younger than me. You'll notice the informal dress; this was the second marriage for both of us—both widowed—and such occasions were not solemnized by big formal weddings in those days.

In this one, Katherine and I are celebrating my upset victory in the '38 Board of Commissioners race against the Amherst family machine. The two-year term was my only flirtation with public office—what a disaster! Here I am in my Army Air Corps uniform in 1942: officially too old for com-

bat, they sent me to operations in the ETO anyway till I was shot up; then I spent the rest of the war training pilots in Lubbock, Texas.

These are all boring here: me and the partners, and the associates, and the well-heeled clients. Now, this one. This is my baby girl, Christine, at her baptism late in '56 . . .

The phone rang from a great distance. I laid the picture book down carefully, got out of the big leather chair, and walked slowly across the parlor into the den. The desk was bare of work—as befitted a seventy-nine-year-old man—but was crowded with pictures. As the phone rang on, I sat down on the swivel chair behind the desk, picked up the receiver, and brought it to my ear.

"Mr. Casella? Lieutenant Drake, Amherstburg P.D."

I'd been a lawyer for a lot longer than I'd been a parent—and was, for every practical purpose, retired from both endeavors—but this call from the police at nine at night still invoked the question: something happen to Chris? "Yes, lieutenant."

"I'm at the residence of Annie Catton. I understand you know her."

"She's a client, yes."

"She's been shot, sir. She's dead."

At my age, I'd had many calls reporting deaths: both parents, both wives, both brothers. But my mouth still went dry.

"Shot?" I echoed.

"Yes, sir." Voice not unrespectful, but flat, metallic, professional. "We're told she has no close relatives. We found your name in her records. We'd appreciate your coming to identify the remains."

"Of course." My breathing became rapid, and I trembled. "I'll be right there."

I hung up the phone. I found myself staring at the heavily veined, translucent skin of the back of my hand on the receiver. My left leg hurt as it did when I stood on it for a very long time. I straightened and thought, Annie Catton. I must go. I stood and lurched across the den toward my bedroom on the far side of the house, thinking about what I would wear. And just a fleeting aftertaste of a dream hung in my mind: a dream about a rutted road, and a bluff, and an old man's hand rubbing a granite wall lovingly.

**A**nnie Catton lived alone in her late mother's home on what used to be the south edge of Amherstburg: As I drove that way in my plain, unpretentious Pontiac sedan, I thought about

what a fine neighborhood it once was. Back when I was dating her mother. It was a wealthy neighborhood. Big, fine houses, clean lawns. You never saw anybody carry a lunch box in that neighborhood, that's for sure.

That was years before Amherstburg exploded and swallowed up the neighborhood and turned it into a rundown eyesore. Now I drove slowly and carefully with doors locked, looked directly at no one, and took care to park under the bright safe light of the street's only working light, even though it was more than half a block from Annie's house.

The young uniformed officer stepped back respectfully as I approached Annie Catton's door. Inside, to the left of the foyer, was the parlor, all chintz and heavy drapes and embroidered wallpaper and solid wood furniture packed in too tight. On the huge braided rug by the biggest sofa lay a body, covered entirely by a white sheet. Next to it stood two people: my daughter, Christine Casella, in slacks and a white, open-necked sleeveless blouse, and a tall, thin young man with a hatchet face, dressed in a dark nondescript suit. The dark highboy in the corner was open and another plainclothesman was staring contemplatively into it.

Chris dropped her hand, which held a small spiral notebook, to her side and rushed to me. "Dad, how are you?"

"I'm fine, swee. Working late, too?" I briefly pressed the side of my head against her dark, tight curls. She smiled, but didn't get a chance to answer because the man with her approached. "Bob Drake, Mr. Casella."

"Lieutenant," I acknowledged.

Drake was mostly nose, teeth, and jowls, seasoned with the quick, curt, coarse flavor of the professional street cop. "I'm sorry we disturbed you so late. As it turns out, after we called you we found that Annie Catton has a relative."

"Edgar Amherst," I nodded. "Uncle once removed, I believe."

"Yes, sir. Mr. Amherst is on his way now to make the identification. Unless you'd care to have a look, sir."

I glanced at the sheet-covered body and back into the young policeman's face. "I'll pass," I said dryly.

The man at the highboy called, "Lieutenant?"

"Excuse me," Drake nodded at us, and swung importantly away toward his assistant at the highboy.

Chris looked up at me, the freckles standing out on her

fair, almost transparent skin. "Are you all right, Daddy? You look pale."

"I'm fine."

She lowered her voice. "Didn't you remember that Annie Catton is distantly related to the Amherst family? You could have saved yourself the trip over here."

I ignored her. "What happened, sweet?"

She exhaled, puffing her cheeks, as she flipped open her notebook and scanned it. "Pretty ugly. Somebody called in a shots fired. Anonymously, of course; *this* neighborhood. The garbage car caught the squeal and showed up about twenty minutes ago. Front window—one over there—was smashed. They had to force the front door. Found Mrs. Catton face down, right about where she is now. Medical examiner and detectives showed up ten minutes later. It was a shotgun. From behind, through the window, in the back of the head. She was killed instantly."

I heard a car door slam outside, and muffled male voices. Lieutenant Drake had returned to us. Chris asked him crisply, "Find anything?"

He shrugged lazily, looking at us through dead eyes. "Bottle of booze seems to be missing from the highboy. There were five bottles on the shelf and a

gap right in the middle with a clean spot in the dust. Maybe the old lady took it earlier and left it somewhere in the house."

I asked, "Anything else missing, lieutenant?"

"Not that we can tell."

I stared into his eyes. "So it wasn't a robbery. Then, why else would someone shoot down a helpless old woman like that?"

"Hey, I don't know," he said sharply. "This is the south end, Mr. Casella. Around here, hell, people get blown away all the time, sometimes we never get it figured out." His eyes left mine and stared over my shoulder. I turned to see two men in dark business suits come through the door. They paused in the foyer, stared at us, then walked in, the older man assertively, the younger one hesitantly.

Drake said, "Mr. Amherst. Good evening, sir."

The older man said in a husky voice, "Yes." He was tall, broad-shouldered; with a completely bald head, a chunky square face, and narrow, pale gray, commanding eyes. I was surprised to see that he looked older than his seventy-eight years; he was just six months younger than I. As he stopped, his look passed me as if I weren't there and lighted on Christine.

Drake stepped to my left. "Mr. Amherst, this is—"

"Casella," Amherst grunted.  
"I know."

"Evening, Edgar," I said neutrally.

"Don't know what the hell you're doing here," he answered, looking at my chin.

"I'm her lawyer."

Edgar Amherst grunted again, then gestured toward the younger man, who'd gone to Christine and hugged her. "Guess you know who this is. My grandson Pat."

"I'm *working*," Christine hissed to Pat as she pushed him away.

"I know him," I answered Amherst.

Lieutenant Drake took charge as the whip-thin Pat Amherst let my daughter go and resumed his position by his grandfather. Drake said, "Mr. Amherst, I'm sorry to ask you out here this evening—"

"Let's get it over with," Amherst grunted. "That her?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well. Let's go."

With just a look he commanded his grandson to stay where he was, and went past us to the body with Drake. We didn't turn to watch. I looked at Christine, who was just finishing scribbling a note. She nodded toward the foyer and we walked there with Pat Amherst right behind us. As we reached it, a pair of potbellied orderlies

pushed their way noisily through the door, then quieted and waited against the wall, watching the identification take place across the room from us.

Pat Amherst appeared to my left. "So glad to meet you, sir." All bright, fresh-faced earnestness, with, reassuringly, nervousness appropriate for a man who was sleeping with my daughter.

"After all this time," I finished for him.

Christine wheedled, "We've all been busy, Daddy. I've been meaning to bring him by for months."

I grinned into Pat Amherst's young face. "Doesn't this, uh, association with my daughter give you problems with Edgar? Our families aren't exactly on the best of terms. Never have been."

Pat shrugged nonchalantly. "I run my life. I'm only here tonight because I happened to be having dinner with Grandpa when he got the call to come here."

The offhand bravado may have been sincere, for all I knew. He smiled at Christine. "Lucky coincidence," he breathed.

I wasn't so far gone that I couldn't feel the electricity between them. I smiled. "Seems like I'm just a fifth wheel here. I'll say goodnight now."



I made for the door.

Christine took my arm and faced me. "Daddy, can we come to dinner tomorrow night? I want you to really get to know Pat. Please?"

I remembered that face as it once was: younger, blonder, fresher. As an oldest child, an only child, and a girl child, Christine had always gotten her way. I looked at the young man and said, "All right."

Then his grandfather loomed behind him. I asked quietly, "That *was* Annie, wasn't it, Edgar?"

"Of course," Amherst rumbled.

He stared at me, leaning forward on the balls of his feet like the old playground scrapper he always was.

I studied his pasty features and sunken eyes and observed, "You're looking tired, Edgar. Been working hard?"

"I *am* tired," he retorted. "Just got back from Paris this morning. Family business. No damned concern of yours, Casella."

When I didn't react, Amherst lowered his voice and said, "I s'pose you got her will."

"I was her lawyer."

"Why that was I'll never know. She never had family loyalty, is all there is to *that*. God rest her soul."

"No lawyers in the Amherst

family, Edgar," I answered. "Only politicians," I turned from him, bent to my daughter, and kissed her. "Tomorrow night, sweet. Six thirty, both of you. It'll be just swell."

I pushed through the door, down the stoop, and walked down the driveway toward my car. Despite the hideous death that had taken place behind me, I was smiling, lightfooted, strangely energized. Then, as I reached the street, I had a sudden—um—thought, I guess is the best way to put it. It wasn't a dream or a vision or anything, just a thought out of nowhere. Of a man singing, face beaming, up toward a bright blue sky. Carrying a big stick. From somewhere came the smell of fish. Beyond us, a checkerboard pattern spread out to the horizon in yellow and green.

**T**he firm was called Casella, Canady and Wicke. I vetoed suggestions to change it even though the second and third names were no longer relevant, for the reason indicated on our letterhead: HARRY A. CANADY 1905-1960 CHAS. L. WICKE, 1908-1978. The name above theirs was not followed by dates, but, to indicate my status within the firm, labeled me Emeritus Partner.

Which about summed it up. By that time, the firm had eight

partners, fifteen associates, and twenty or twenty-five administrative and support people. There was not a lot for me to do. My job was to handle a few clients—a few very *old* clients, mostly probate work; to sign things; to be the gray eminence on those rare occasions when my help was sought (even though I knew it was mostly a formality); and to get in the way.

My other major function was to preside over a weekly meeting of the partners to hear reports on current business. By that time, I mainly half-dozed through those, and was doing just that on the day after Annie Catton died until Bill Waite, the junior partner (and, as such, the goat who got stuck with the most trivial matters), got to the part of his report which dealt with the Amherstburg South Center shopping mall project.

"... more signature left and we'll be able to move that one, too," Waite said in monotone.

I shifted myself up in my big chair at the head of the table. "I'm sorry, Bill. Move what?"

Bill Waite and the other partners stared placidly at me through the pall of smoke hanging in the dark-panelled conference room. Waite, who stood awkwardly at his place about halfway down the table on my left, said, "The grave, E.O. The

last one left in the cemetery."

"What cemetery?"

Waite pursed his lips nervously and scanned his notes. He'd run through his report by rote, knowing that the partners hardly listened to him and never asked him questions, and he never dreamed he was going to be put on the spot. "Polataw Methodist. On the northeast quadrant of the shopping mall's proposed parking lot. The owners have sold the land to the corporation, but state law requires that permission from descendants of the interred be obtained before the graves can be moved. There's only one, uh, grave, left for sign-offs."

"Whose?" I sensed the thinking of the other partners: Here's old E.O., wasting pre-lunch time with a lot of tiresome questions about a routine matter.

The indirect overhead lighting reflected off Waite's glasses as he looked at me. "Joshua Amherst. Passed away over seventy years ago. Did you know him, E.O.?"

A burst of friendly laughter from around the table. I smiled. "Don't believe so. The Amhersts and I have always been on opposite sides. What sign-offs do you need, Bill?"

Waite confidently looked up at me from his notes. "We got the approval of Mr. Edgar Amherst. Got Annie Catton's, too,

she was a niece or something. All we need now is Pat Amherst. There was a nephew of Edgar's, Paul Amherst, some kind of artist, but he was gunned down in Paris earlier this week." Waite smiled. "I don't think it's important."

"Paris." Life had been ugly to the Amhersts lately, I mused with, admittedly, just the smallest touch of satisfaction. I looked down at my hands, and at the hands of the other partners lined up on the shining mahogany table, then looked at Waite. "Then this Joshua Amherst's grave will be moved?"

"Yes, sir. The other graves have already been moved to a site right back of there, with a grove of trees separating it from the shopping center."

I felt all their white faces looking at mine. Though I kept my breathing moderate, I felt I could not fill my lungs. I felt if I asked one more question, pressed just a bit more forward, some great lid would open in my mind. But it was getting toward lunch, the partners were shuffling legs and sifting papers, I was a foolish old man, and I waved my hand at Bill Waite, dismissing the subject.

**T**he dinner could have been a fiasco. After all, Christine was sharing an apartment with Pat Am-

herst, and she knew—though I had kept my own counsel; she was, after all, an adult—I did not approve, which explained why she had not brought him to meet me before. Further, bad blood between me and Pat's family ran all the way back to an autumn day in 1912 when I punched Edgar Amherst in the eye and sent him home to his mommy crying, and was further disadvantaged by the Amherst family's position as patriarchs of the town, as opposed to my rural upbringing. Finally, there was the natural barrier of age with which to contend.

But, up to the very end, the evening went well. The prime rib and steamed vegetables and salad, prepared by Mrs. Anglais, who cleaned for me and cooked when I requested it, were excellent. The two bottles of Cambresis '61 were well worth the wait. My daughter never looked more radiant than that night, dressed in a simple scarlet dress with pearls around her neck. Pat Amherst proved to be not only civil, but bright and earnest and entertaining and surprisingly human, regaling us with stories of his aristocratic family caught in humorous circumstances. My favorite symphony, Dvorak's *From the New World*, played from the old hi-fi in my study as Amherst

and I smoked fragrant (and unauthorized) cigars and sipped brandy and told jokes as Christine listened and laughed, her eyes as radiant on Pat as they were on me.

And then, somehow, the talk got around to the Amherstburg South Center shopping mall project.

Christine had lighted a cigarette—one of the brown ones that looks like a small cigar—and said, “I thought the story was a dog. One of those wastebasket things, you know, that women on the paper tend to get stuck with. Till I found out about the Amherst mausoleum.”

Pat Amherst and I sat in identical poses, cigar in one hand, brandy glass in the other, and stared at her.

She said: “See, they have to get permission from the descendants of the deceased before they can move the graves for the shopping mall parking lot. There’s this old mausoleum there. Belongs to Joshua Amherst. The corporation hasn’t gotten all the approvals from his descendants, so it hasn’t been moved back to the new site. It’s the only one left. My editor was curious—graves always make for good stories; besides, the Amherst name still sells papers in this town. So I looked into it.”

I glanced at Pat. His glance was averted from Chris and me. He held the brandy glass in such a way that it looked like he was about to spill it. I looked at my daughter. By God, Chris, I thought, you set him up for this. Bringing him here to meet me was just another excuse to work on a story, wasn’t it, sweet.

Pat Amherst was silent and still. I heard the *New World* drawing to an end. I felt the pleasurable momentum of the evening draining away like rice out of a ripped sack, and I felt depressed and unnerved and just a little bit scared.

My daughter said: “I spent a few hours in the morgue at the paper, and I found out the damndest things, Daddy. Joshua Amherst—‘Jake’—was the family black sheep. A hippie, a pre-World War I hippie. He was married once, but she died, and he built the mausoleum for her and buried her in it. He had a big chunk of the Amherst family money and didn’t have to work, so he moved to a shack outside of Amherstburg and let his hair grow and became the town eccentric. The Amhersts were ashamed of him. They tried to have him locked up in an asylum, but failed. They tried to take his money away from him, but failed. So they shunned him. Then, in 1911, he disappeared, and no

one ever heard from him again."

Jake, I thought dully. Jake.

My daughter looked at her lover and asked casually, "Have you signed the permission to have old Jake's mausoleum transferred, Pat?"

"Yes," he answered shortly, staring into his brandy. "Why shouldn't I? It's old stuff, doesn't concern me. Besides, my grandfather owns an interest in the mall development company. He asked me to sign, so I did."

"Well, Pat," she retorted in the argumentative tone I knew so well, "I guess your attitude as the Amherst family rebel is just a pose. You're always telling me how you're your own man and not under your grandfather's thumb."

"Stop it, Chris," he muttered, swirling the brandy in his glass. "No one talks about . . . Joshua. My grandfather won't permit it. I don't know why and I never asked."

I felt more nervous and uncomfortable and, for the first time in thirty years, wanted a real smoke, a filterless Camel cigarette. "Leave it be, Chris. Please."

Her grin was fixed, her eyes were glassy on Pat Amherst, and she ignored me. "Come on, Pat. Either you're your grandfather's stooge, or you're not. Which is it?"

Pat Amherst set his brandy

glass down on the table so recklessly that it tipped over and dumped golden liquid into the cloth. He shoved his chair back, rose, pointed his white hand—some face at me—and said, "Thanks for the dinner, sir," and, with a toss of his napkin in Chris's direction, walked purposefully toward the dining room door.

Chris and I stood simultaneously, I faster than she. I went after him fast, pushing my way past my daughter, through the open dining room door into the long paneled hallway, and had just caught up with him when the glass in one of the tall, narrow windows to our right broke and the dull gleam of twin shotgun barrels leveled toward us. I got a glimpse of the face behind them—but the image was erased by a sheet of white flame as the gun roared and the two of us went down, me on top of the younger man.

Panting, winded, numb, I crawled off Pat, who was whimpering. My daughter, face stricken, took my two frail arms in her strong hands and drew me to my feet. "Oh, my God, Daddy! Are you all right?"

Amherst stood unsteadily. He appeared unhit. I saw the jagged pockmarks of shotgun pellets embedded in the cherrywood paneling behind him. I turned and looked over my daughter's



shoulder at the shattered window—

And it all came back, with vivid clarity. Like an unearthed Griffith film, from the days when the mule paths of the Miami & Erie Canal were barely grown over . . . when men at the wheel were goggled daredevils . . . when the Kaiser was a distant and unimportant threat . . . when the wood boardwalks of our small village were crowded with story-telling Civil War veterans . . . when the signs at railroad crossings said WATCH OUT FOR THE LOCOMOTIVE instead of STOP LOOK & LISTEN . . . when Arizona was still a territory . . . and a small boy found a miracle in an old man who let me call him Jake.

The young people were close to me, hands on me, breathing audibly. I said, "Get tools from the garage. Then, Polataw Cemetery. Quickly. Now."

**T**he long, grassy bluff glowed silver from the light of a first-quarter moon. Around us were mounds of dirt and cavities in the ground; all that was left of the unearthed dead. The tires of Christine's Toyota crunched loudly in the gravel as we reached the top of the hill and stopped. On our left was the mausoleum, at the very crest of the bluff, standing black and

square against the starry ink of the night sky.

I climbed weakly out of the car. My seat flopped forward, and Pat Amherst climbed out after me. We faced Christine over the moonlit hood of her car, the scarlet dress a mottled brown in the silvery, dim light. She looked toward the mausoleum, then back at me. "What now, Daddy?"

"Tools," I said tonelessly to Pat Amherst.

Chris tossed him the keys. As he opened the trunk and drew out the hammer, pick, hacksaw, and flashlight, he said to me quietly, "I don't like this, sir."

I felt I hadn't the breath or the time for argument. "Perhaps you prefer being shot at."

"We should have called the police," he said loudly, his voice rolling down the slope away from us.

"Let's go." I turned my back and led them to the front of the mausoleum.

For a long moment we stared at it. It had a single, corroded brass door and two tiny stained glass windows in its granite facade. Above the door was engraved the word AMHERST. I reached out my withered, veined hand and felt the smooth granite wall and, as I did so, turned and gazed down the bluff where the fields used to be, remem-

bering Jake Amherst's words: "See here? This is my place to rest, Earle. This is where I'm gonna live. I'm gonna go inside here with a fifth of corn likker and my twelve gauge, and lock the door behind me, and when I've drunk the gallon up I'm gonna blow myself to kingdom come. Nobody's ever going to find me, and nobody'll ever move me again. This is my place to rest, Earle. Everybody needs a place to rest. Someday when you're old like me you'll understand what I mean...."

"What now, sir?" Pat asked dully.

I gestured. "Open it up."

Christine said gently, "Daddy—"

"*Open it!*" I shrieked.

I stood back as Pat Amherst reached for the tarnished knobs and rattled them. There was no give in the doors. He took the hammer and whacked the door several times, making a bass echo from inside. The door refused to give. By God, I thought grimly, they knew how to build things back in 1911.

I said, "Take the pick. Pry it."

Pat's face was dull and resolute. My daughter looked flushed and bright-eyed in the moonlight. Amherst took the pick, inserted the spade end securely in the crack between the doors, walked himself to the end of the handle, and leaned

his weight against it, his arm muscles bulging against the good cloth of his dinner jacket.

A dull, substantial, metallic snap, and the left-hand door edged open a half inch.

Amherst withdrew the pick and set it down. I inserted my fingers in the crack and pried at the door, pulling with all my strength, the exertion making my heart thump. The door gave just a hair at a time, moving on hinges that obviously hadn't been used in many, many years. Amherst joined me and we pulled together until the door was open perhaps eighteen inches, then we let go, breathing hard.

I asked Christine hoarsely, "The flashlight?"

She hefted it, switched it on, and pointed it at the door. Neither of the young people made a move, so I stepped sideways into the mausoleum and the others followed.

The dull heavy sweet smell seemed to give the trapped air inside a substance of its own. Aside from a very dim glow through the small, narrow, stained glass windows, Christine's flashlight gave the only illumination as it played around the tiny room.

The right-hand wall was a series of plain bronze plaques, nine in all, each about two feet square and only one engraved:

CATHERINE CARO AMHERST  
BORN AT BELLEFONTAINE, OHIO,  
OCTOBER 10, 1835  
DIED AT AMHERSTBURG,  
JANUARY 2, 1900  
"LIFE IS BUT A DREAM"

"Jake's wife," Christine whispered unnecessarily. The narrow, golden cone of the flashlight wandered down the wall to the floor, where an ornate vase lay tipped on its side, the brown, spindly, bone-dry remains of flower stems jutting out of it.

I knew what we'd find next, but I let Christine play the flashlight slowly to the left, piercing the thick darkness to reveal a stone bench set into the granite wall beneath one of the stained glass windows. Then the light caught Jake, and froze, and Christine gasped, just once.

He lay in a half-seated position on the floor, leaning against the left-hand wall. The knee-length rubber boots had rotted in many places, showing the bones of his toes. The denim trousers and loose, off-white shirt had rotted away in places as well. The white bones of the face gleamed without expression at us, the chinbone resting on the top of his sternum, the floppy hat still on his head. The rear hemisphere of the skull was completely gone. The shotgun lay across the chest in the

position of port arms. An empty whisky bottle lay sideways on the floor by what had been Jake Amherst's right hand. On the other side of him stood a white porcelain jug.

I felt my companions breathing tensely beside me. Christine said softly, "I don't believe it. After all these years."

Pat Amherst said in a slow, strangled, wonder-filled voice, "He shot himself." He turned and pushed his way out of the mausoleum, and we heard him retch outside.

Christine, training the flashlight like a gun on the corpse, advanced a couple of steps toward it. Filled with a sudden indescribable weakness, I leaned back against the cool granite wall by the door. Christine's foot brushed the whisky bottle and it rolled back toward the corpse, its label—VAT 69—showing in the light. Christine picked up the bottle and examined it, then said, "The tax sticker is dated 1983."

I grasped my left flank with my right hand, pressing my arm hard across my abdomen.

Christine turned to me, her face unreadable since the flashlight shone down toward Jake. "It's impossible," she breathed. "This mausoleum hasn't been opened in over seventy years."

"He brought it here. It's the missing bottle from Annie's

house." My voice was breathy and faint and going. I said, "It's all right, Jake. You'll stay here. I promise."

"Daddy!" she said, voice sharp, with just a tremor in it.

"He shot them. The ones who signed to allow his home to be moved. He shot Paul in Paris, and Annie, and he tried for Pat—"

She swung the flashlight in my direction and stepped toward me. "Daddy? What's the matter?"

I took a half-breath; the pain would allow no more. "I seem to have been hit. One of the shotgun pellets . . . back at the house."

Cupping the flashlight under her arm so it shone on me, Christine put her hands on my biceps, inserted one hand gently under my coat, and brought it back out bloody. I felt her tremble as she said in a hard, tense voice, "We've got to get you to the hospital. Why didn't you say anything?"

"I'm an old man," I whispered. "I'm used to pain."

She slid herself under my arm to support me.

"Pat!" she called. "Come here, quick!"

"Don't blame Jake," I told

her. "He didn't mean to shoot me. Jake wouldn't ever hurt me on purpose. He was my friend."

"Stop it. 'Jake' hasn't been anywhere tonight."

"Then what about the whisky bottle?" I asked, smiling.

"Never mind that." With slow, careful steps she tottered me to the mausoleum door and called out, "Pat? Pat!" No answer. "Damned coward. Come on, Daddy, let's get you some help."

"No hurry."

She edged me through the door. "Don't worry. You'll be safe soon."

"I know."

**I**t was a very close call, but my promise to Jake Amherst was kept.

Next time you're in Amherstburg, drive out to the South Center Mall. Right in the middle of the east parking lot, at the top of the hill, partitioned off from the acres of asphalt parking lot by a high wrought iron fence, you'll find Jake Amherst's final resting place.

If you happen to stroll east from there, past the edge of the parking lot, through a grove of trees and then left into a peaceful, stone-dotted meadow, you'll find mine.

FICTION

# Murder Rewrapped

by Hy Conrad

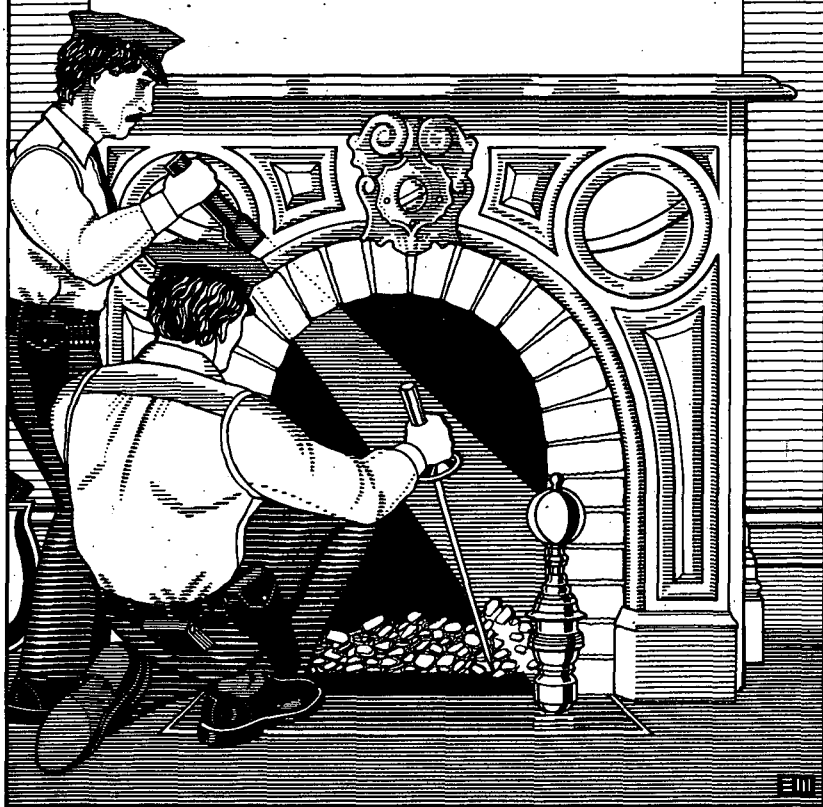


Illustration by Eric Marcus



“I don’t know what you’re expecting to find here, Cavanaugh.” An unfriendly smile hovered on his lips. “If you ask me, it was a wasted trip, and you should just go home.”

This was my introduction to Sheriff Horace Kiley. The local citizenry must have rested easier just knowing that an idiot like that was on the job.

“Don’t mean to be unsociable,” Kiley lied, leaning back in his chair and lifting one mud-splattered boot onto the desk. “But just let me tell you right off—your clients are guilty as sin.”

“A P.I. makes most of his living off guilty clients.” I remembered back to the last time I was humble and tried to reproduce that expression on my face. “I’m just taking their money, sheriff.”

“Good,” he said, wrenching his angular face into another smile. He wasn’t much older than I was, but his extreme leanness brought out the wrinkles. “I don’t want you going to a lot of trouble on a wrapped-up case.”

Max—my assistant, Maxine Blair—had pushed for this one, and I was already regretting it. Max considers anything outside Manhattan as the nearest she’ll ever get to a paid vacation. Her morning was being spent over tea and crumpets

with an old friend at the village paper, the *Sentinel*, while I was sitting there practicing my humble expression and thinking how it might be easier next year just to give her the two weeks off.

I looked around the small, homey office—the stuffed owl mounted beside an old diploma, wife and kiddies on the desk, trusty squirrel rifle over the door, coat tree with a holstered revolver hanging from it—and thought how this was more like a stage set than a real sheriff’s office. The *Sentinel* had already called him a combination Sherlock Holmes and Will Rogers, and the folksy setup told me that Kiley was actively promoting the image.

Derrick Reardon was the victim here, a local industrialist living with his wife and younger brother on a small estate facing Long Island Sound. He was in his early fifties, the kind of man it wasn’t too hard to live with as long as you kept in mind that someday he’d die and leave you his money. And that’s just what he did. They found him in his bedroom one cold night that March, poison in his stomach and a bullet in his brain.

“I guess you could say it all started with Pamela.” Kiley laced his bony fingers behind his head and began the performance that must have thrilled a dozen reporters. “Al-

though she doesn't really enter into it, except for increasing their motive." He lifted the other mud-splattered boot onto the desk, and I knew I was in for a long morning. "Pamela Reardon. She's Reardon's daughter. He spent the past few years looking for her. We were helping him on it, a pretty intensive search. She was the child of a failed marriage, an early marriage, and Reardon had last seen her fourteen years ago. Are you listening, Cavanaugh?"

"Sure. I concentrate better with my eyes closed."

"I'm only going through this once." Thank God. "So you'd better listen. Reardon's ex-wife had gone off somewhere, taking away the kid. Word came back that the wife had died in an accident, so naturally Reardon was anxious to get back the kid. She's his only one. Reardon scoured the orphanages until he finally found her. Pamela, a sweet young thing of seventeen. She moved into the family mansion a few months ago, and that's when the trouble started."

"According to your version."

"According to the facts." Kiley tried to sit up, but of course that's hard to do with both feet propped on a desk. It wound up looking like a spasm. His swivel chair bobbed around as he gave me one of those "I dare you to laugh" glares.

I wisely decided against it. "You can prove that Reardon intended to change his will in Pamela's favor?"

"Of course we can. We can also prove that Reardon's present wife, his widow, whatever you want to call her, was having an affair with his younger brother. They admitted it. Can you believe those morons?"

Those morons were now my clients, and they had the two best motives in the book. They both inherited under the present will, and their love affair would go a sight more smoothly with Derrick out of the way.

Elisa was the wife, the kind of woman millionaire-mothers warn their sons about, which probably explains why so many millionaire-sons marry them. She was too young—a good twenty years younger than Derrick—too beautiful, and too restless to make a safe wife. As soon as Elisa had tired of re-decorating the mansion, she quickly turned her attention to the man in her life. Unfortunately the man wasn't her husband.

He was Tom Reardon. Tom seemed nice enough, a handsome forty-two, only ten years older than Elisa, congenial, maybe a little weak-willed, but nobody's perfect. (If my descriptions seem a mite general, it's because I actually met my clients only twice, once as a fa-

vor from Sheriff Kiley and once the next day when I repackaged his wrapped-up case.)

"The trick was to recreate that evening accurately." Kiley was in full bloom now, sawing the air with a long, unlit cigar. "There were only four people at dinner—the victim, the two suspects, and the newfound daughter, Pamela."

"Did you check out the servants?"

"No, we've been waiting for some smart New York detective to make the suggestion. Of course we checked out the servants. Besides not having motives and them all being with the family for God knows how long, not one had any chance of tampering with that decanter."

"The poison was definitely placed in the decanter, then, and not in his wine glass?"

Kiley must have fielded this question a dozen times. His right hand reached into a manila folder and pushed the lab report under my nose before I'd even finished the sentence. I didn't have to fake a humble look after reading that tidbit.

"You see, Cavanaugh? It had to be Elisa. They're having drinks before dinner, right? Tom is sitting there with a mixed drink. Pamela has a Shirley Temple. Elisa and the victim are sipping wine from that same decanter. Everyone's feeling fine. No problem.

"They go into the dining room and Elisa, the loving wife, makes a point of carrying in the decanter instead of leaving it to the butler or somebody. They sit down to dinner and suddenly she's not drinking wine any more, only Derrick. Nobody else touches the decanter now, only Derrick. Only Derrick is yapping about indigestion; only Derrick dies from a neurotoxin, a two-buck word for poison. The lab boys come in, checking everything edible, and they strike paydirt with the decanter. All right, Mr. Hotshot, who else could have done it?"

"I damn well hope you're innocent. If not, I'm going to pay my own carfare to Sing Sing and volunteer to pull the switch."

I've got to hand it to Tom Reardon. Not many strangers know how to interpret my sense of humor. He smiled. "Has Sheriff Kiley been giving you a hard time?"

"I'll live."

I had a half hour to see my clients at the county jail, payment for swallowing my pride with Kiley. They were dressed in their own clothes and held hands under the table like scared teenagers. It was an inside room with no windows except for a square hole in the door. The sound of shuffling

feet in the corridor told me that nothing would go unheard.

With her free hand Elisa brushed back her long, dark hair. She was holding up well, or so I assumed. If she looked much better than this under normal circumstances, I don't know any man who wouldn't succumb. "He's making small things look bad, Mr. Cavanaugh, like my not drinking the wine at dinner. I only drink water when I'm eating. Wine makes me thirsty."

"What about your taking the decanter into the dining room?"

"I'm afraid I wasn't raised with a butler following me around. If I want something moved, I carry it. I certainly didn't have the time to slip poison into it."

"I don't know Kiley very well, Mrs. Reardon, but I'm sure he wouldn't make that kind of assumption unless he'd timed the whole procedure."

"She didn't do it, Cavanaugh. Are you going to waste your time grilling her or are you going to try to find out what really happened?"

"That's okay, Tom. It's Mr. Cavanaugh's job to be skeptical. I'm sure we're not his easiest case." Elisa gently patted Tom's hand. "Another thing that looks worse than it was—" She raised her eyes to meet mine. "Derrick often complained about indigestion. It

wasn't just that night. Dr. Morfield used to be sent for on quite a regular basis."

"How often did the doctor visit? How many times a month?"

"Two or three. At one point I suggested replacing the cook, but Derrick only laughed. That kind of recurring indigestion after a meal didn't seem normal to me."

Nor to me. After hearing news like this, my first reaction would be to check up on the poison just in case the killer had done something fancy, like slipping it to him over a few months. But the sheriff with the Cheshire-cat grin had already shown me the lab report. Although the experts couldn't identify the poison's exact makeup, there was no doubt about its toxicity. Derrick Reardon died an hour after first tasting it, an hour or less.

In the middle of dessert, it seemed, our millionaire had begun complaining of indigestion. The butler put a call through to Dr. Theodore Morfield. Dr. Morfield lived maybe five minutes away by car. He was an old family friend, but that didn't keep his testimony at the inquest from hurting my clients.

According to Morfield he had arrived at the mansion at approximately eight thirty. "I examined the patient, Derrick Reardon, in the library," he'd

gone on to say. "We were alone. His wife asked to be present during the examination, but for some reason, Derrick didn't want her there.

"The patient complained of acute dyspepsia. After a superficial examination I made a diagnosis of gastroenteritis, a general inflammation of the stomach, and gave him—uh, what amounted to an antacid tablet. There was no reason to suspect poison at the time.

"Derrick took the medication and agreed that it might be a good idea to retire early. Tom, his brother, met us in the hallway. He seemed concerned about Derrick's health and insisted on escorting him to his bedroom. That was at perhaps ten minutes to nine.

"I was putting on my coat when I had second thoughts and decided to stay, at least for a few minutes. It had crossed my mind that this might be food poisoning. I sat down in the drawing room with Derrick's wife, Elisa. I asked her about dinner, and she assured me they had all eaten the same food and that no one else seemed to be suffering from stomach pains.

"It was approximately nine o'clock when Tom came down from Derrick's room. There was a curious expression on his face. In retrospect I suppose it might have been anxiety. I asked him

how Derrick was feeling, and Tom said his brother appeared to be feeling better.

"Elisa had poured me a bourbon, and I was sitting with them in the drawing room, enjoying the drink and their company. As I indicated, Tom was a bit on edge. I asked him if there was anything wrong. He said no, but that he would like to speak with Elisa for a minute, alone.

"There seemed to be some domestic drama in the air—I was glad to be spared the details. I left them together and went across the hall to the library, closing the door in order to give them privacy.

"It was less than a minute later that I heard the shot. The library is directly underneath Derrick's bedroom. The fireplace in the library shares the same flue with the fireplace upstairs, so there was no doubt in my mind where the noise had come from. You see, a fire was burning in the library, so the flue was open. The noise came from Derrick's room, straight down the flue.

"I ran out into the hallway. At about the same time Elisa and Tom came out of the drawing room. I told them where the shot had come from, and the three of us went up.

"Derrick's bedroom is at the top of the stairs. We knocked and called his name but there

was no response. I finally opened the door.

"The only light was from the fireplace, a flickering glow but enough to let us recognize a body face down beside the bed. A thick stench hit me as soon as I walked in, as though something out of the ordinary were being burned.

"I approached the decedent. My back was turned to Tom and Elisa as I examined the body, so I can't say exactly what they were doing in those first few seconds, if they indeed were doing anything besides taking in the general situation.

"Derrick was undoubtedly dead. I went over to the far side of the body and that's when I saw the cause of death, a small-bore bullet hole in his left temple. I announced this fact, and Elisa seemed very shocked by it. I can't remember her words, but they were something like 'How could that be?' or 'That's impossible'—some declaration of disbelief. I was afraid of hysterics on her part, and I told Tom to take her out of the room, which he did. He took her downstairs.

"I spent perhaps another half-minute in the bedroom, not touching anything but the corpse. Derrick's left hand was tucked underneath his body. I moved him slightly and noticed a gun in that hand, so naturally my first thought was suicide.

There was nothing more I could do except lock up the room and call the police, which is exactly what I did."

"Your half-hour's up." The shuffling feet outside the holding cell had developed a voice.

"Kiley told me I could have an hour. Go ask him if you don't believe me."

The feet shuffled away. I figured I had two minutes before he checked up, found me to be a liar, and forcibly ejected me; two minutes of privacy.

"Okay, Tom, quick. What happened when you took Derrick up to his room?"

"Nothing. Nothing I haven't told the police."

Elisa glared at him angrily. "Don't be a ninny, Tom. Mr. Cavanaugh has to know." She turned to me with a smile that said excuse the ninny, he doesn't know whom to trust.

"Tom thought I'd poisoned Derrick. That's why he came down and asked the doctor to leave us. Of course I hadn't poisoned my husband and I told him so. I'm not sure he believed me. Anyway, it was shortly afterwards that we heard the shot."

"I didn't know what to believe." Tom was speaking quickly now, aware of our time limit. "By the time I got him to his room, he was having trouble breathing. I was about to go down and fetch Dr. Morfield



when Derrick managed to get out one word, the word that stopped me."

"Not so dramatic, dear, you're wasting time. My husband said 'poison,' Mr. Cavanaugh."

"It was a whisper but very clear. The only thing I could think was that Elisa had poisoned him." Tom looked at her apologetically. "Of course I know better now, but at the time I—naturally I had to confront her as soon as possible. When I left Derrick in his room he was alive—barely. I was just as surprised as everyone else when we heard that gunshot, believe me."

Two pairs of feet, one shuffling and the other decidedly angry, were approaching the cell. "All right, Cavanaugh, you've had your fun," Kiley's voice rang out.

I had underestimated the shuffler's speed. "Is there anything more you can tell me? Tom?"

"No more talking in there. You've had your time." A key was turning in the lock.

"How about Dr. Morfield's testimony? Accurate?"

"Pretty much. He's pretty observant."

"Was there anything he noticed that you didn't?"

The cell door swung open and a second later I was being grabbed from both sides, my arms twisted behind my back.

"Wait a minute," Elisa shouted. And believe it or not they waited. Everything came to a standstill.

Elisa seemed embarrassed by the sudden attention. "That smell he talked about," she said meekly. "The doctor said something about a strong burning odor."

"That's right, the burning pillow," Kiley responded. "The smell was all over the bedroom. I smelled it myself the second I walked in."

"But that's just it. I was only in the bedroom that once, when we first saw the body, but—"

"What are you going to tell us, Mrs. Reardon, that you didn't smell anything? No smoldering pillow in the fireplace?"

"That's what I'm saying, sheriff, I didn't smell a thing. There was a fire in the grate, but there wasn't any smell."

"That's perfect," Kiley snorted as the action resumed. He and the shuffler were forcing me out of the cell and into the corridor. "Lover-boy protects you, and now you try to protect him. These are some clients you got, Cavanaugh."

Their grasp on me relaxed as the iron door slammed behind us. I wrested my arms free in a slick little maneuver, marched straight out of that one-horse-town excuse for a jail block, through the booking room, past the deputy's desk, and into the

street. Who says you can't be thrown out of a place and still hold onto your dignity?

"Hey, Cavanaugh!"

I turned around, just to prove I wasn't embarrassed by confrontation. Kiley was standing on the steps of the courthouse with my coat slung over his arm and my hat in his hand. "You'd better not forget these." He held them out as he wrenched his face into another nasty smile. "We can't have you catching cold while you're out there chasing wild geese."

"You keep them, Kiley." What else could I say after such an exit? "I'll pick them up when I bring in your killer." I matched his nasty smile and then casually strolled away, trying not to look as cold or as stupid as I felt. The things we do to maintain a little pride.

**"W**hy aren't you wearing a coat?"

You can tell Max works for a detective. She notices little things like that. I shivered my way over to the only booth in Mary-Lou's Coffee Shop and sat down across from her. Mary-Lou (or Lou's wife, Mary) came immediately to the rescue, coffeepot in one hand and a cup in the other.

"It's a pledge I made, not to wear a coat until we finish this case."

She grinned from ear to ear, quite a distance. Max had never lost her baby-fat, something of an achievement for a lady in her thirties. "Well, let's hope for an early spring."

I threw back a smirk as I warmed my hands over the Chase and Sanborn. Max had obviously been waiting at least two minutes. That's all the time it takes her to turn any tabletop into a confusion of paper. This particular confusion bore some resemblance to a newspaper morgue—clippings piled on the sugar bowl, bound collections of old copies opened to strategic pages. "I see your pal at the *Sentinel* came through for us." With some feeling restored to my fingers, I shoved them deep into the confusion. "Is there a menu in here?"

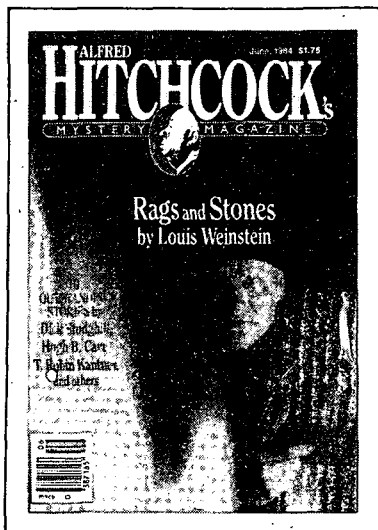
It took me a good minute to find one. There was probably a second-menu somewhere, but I wasn't sure we had the time. Mary or Mary-Lou returned with the coffeepot, and I ordered for both of us—hot dishes.

"We're quite the local curiosity, boss. Over at the Grange they're taking bets we'll be shown up."

"What are the odds?"

"The smart money's on Kiley." Max scooped up a handful of clippings and deposited them on my menu. "You'd better do your homework. Looks like a strong case."

# WATCH OUT!



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I started with the first headline: LOCAL MILLIONAIRE KILLS SELF WITH GUN. Of course there was no way that could be true, but on that first night suicide won as the logical explanation. After all, he was upstairs by himself; the windows were locked, still sealed for the winter; and the gun was in his hand.

The next day the headlines changed to: DERRICK REARDON MURDERED; NO SUSPECTS AS YET. Big deal. Any five-year-old could see it was murder, but I suppose I had to give Kiley credit; maybe a four-year-old could have got it wrong.

Clue Number One: He'd been killed by poison. Someone had put a bullet into the dead man's head in a feeble attempt to disguise the method. As soon as Kiley heard this, a gaggle of lab boys descended on the mansion and came up with the decanter.

Clues Two and Three: Derrick Reardon was right-handed. Yet the bullet hole was in his left temple and the gun in his left hand. Also, there was no powder burn around the wound, indicating the gun wasn't held to the head. I had to laugh when I read that. Poor Derrick was stone-dead when the gun was fired and Kiley was worrying about powder burns? Smart.

Clue Four: The murder room stench. Everyone but Elisa had noticed the burning odor. Its

obvious source was the fireplace. The ashes were raked out and examined, and fragments of goose down were discovered. Someone had recently burned a pillow.

There they were, all the clues you'd ever need. Kiley threw them all together, jiggled them around and came up with a theory. It was decent as theories go—clever and plausible. It just turned out to be wrong.

Elisa poisons her husband, according to Kiley. Tom takes him up to his room. The symptoms get worse, and in a few minutes Derrick is dead. Tom jumps to the same conclusion that Kiley jumped to a day later: Elisa did it.

Tom doesn't know what to do. If he calls for the doctor, then the police are going to piece it together, and the most he can hope for is getting to see his sweetheart once a week on visitors' day. So he thinks up a way to make it look like suicide.

He takes a pillow from the bed. He takes a .22 pistol from God-knows-where and shoots Derrick, using the pillow to cushion the noise. (Unlike a revolver, a pistol's sound is discharged primarily through the barrel.) He tosses the pillow into the fire and places the gun in his brother's hand. To set the time of the suicide, Tom takes a bullet from the gun and puts it in the fireplace, then joins

Elisa and the doctor in the drawing room.

A few minutes later the bullet in the fireplace explodes from the heat, accounting for the gunshot heard through the flue. While Doc Morfield is examining the body, Tom secretly removes the exploded bullet from the fireplace. Voilà.

Max saw me look up from the newsprint. She put down her fork—the first time I've seen her do that in the middle of a meal—and wiped her mouth. "What do you think? Any holes, anything big enough for a foot-hold?"

"A few small ones."

"I knew you could do it!" Her face was glowing with excitement as she reached into the confusion and came up with a notebook and pencil. As much as I kid Max, she's just what I need. "Okay, boss, shoot."

"Don't get too happy. They're mostly curiosities, like the left hand. Tom obviously knew his brother was right-handed. The majority of people are right-handed. So why does the killer shoot him in the left temple and put the gun in his left hand? Somewhere there's a reason.

"Next, the gun itself—a .22 of unknown origin, serial numbers filed off. Where would Tom get a gun like that on the spur of the moment? He's not a collector or marksman. Neither was Derrick."

"Indicating some degree of premeditation."

"Right. Then the decanter. It wasn't till the next morning that the medical examiner cried foul and they came back and grabbed it. If Elisa really poisoned her husband, she had plenty of time to pour out the wine and give everything a good scrubbing."

"That's not a clue. No offense, but—" Max stopped herself, mouth open, took the pencil and scratched her head. "Oh, I see. Whoever poisoned the wine wanted the police to find it."

"You could do this without me, couldn't you?" Neither of us believed that. "Our next problem is the fireplace. It seems unlikely that in a matter of seconds in a dimly lit room Tom could have retrieved that exploded shell."

"Kiley seems to think he had enough time."

"That's because Kiley can't find the shell. Really, Max, sifting through a burning fireplace and picking up a red-hot shell? And don't say asbestos gloves; I'm not in the mood."

Max's eyes wandered back to the roast beef plate in front of her. "Anything else, boss?"

"Yeah." I wasn't really hungry and was tired of sitting down. "Except that I got the information from Elisa. How much do we trust Elisa?" I slapped down money for the check, got

to my feet, and spent five seconds examining the coat rack before I remembered.

"You have to trust her. She's the client." Max returned to her fork. "I'm going to finish up here and get all of this back to the paper. What does Elisa say?"

"She says Derrick was a sucker for indigestion and she has trouble smelling pillows when they burn." I waited for Max's puzzled expression, then winked.

"Oh, good." A smile came to her lips followed immediately by a slice of roast beef. "You're getting cryptic," she mumbled between chews. "Means we're on the right track."

I turned up my collar and walked down Main. It was like any other Main Street.

Shop windows lined both sides and I could see out of the corner of my eye the curious citizens peering out from the storefronts—two men in a barber shop, three ladies and a clerk in the drugstore. It was the reverse of window shopping. I was the display behind glass, "the coatless detective," and suddenly I knew how mannequins felt.

Right around the corner was a hand-lettered sign tied with string to a lamppost. NO PARKING. I reached across the windshield of my tan Chevrolet and removed the ticket. Needless to

say, the lamppost had been there when I parked, but the homemade sign was brand new. I deposited the ticket in my glove compartment and drove off. Things could be worse, I thought. If Kiley really hated me, he would've done something more substantial, like have a new fire hydrant put there.

It was a short, pleasant drive. For some reason rich folks enjoy living cheek by jowl with farms, although they usually pick a place upwind and with enough acreage to set them apart. But my mind wasn't on the scenery. It was too busy following the directions Tom had given me. And it was thinking about Pamela. She was the one part of the puzzle that refused to fit.

"I'll tell Miss Pamela you're here."

The butler walked away in that supercilious manner somebody must enjoy watching or else butlers wouldn't walk that way. He had deposited me in the drawing room, and immediately I gravitated to the generous fire roaring in the grate.

Pamela was a puzzle, all right. Looking at the whole thing objectively, there wasn't any reason to suspect her. If Derrick was planning to change his will in his daughter's favor, and



Kiley seemed to have proof of this, then his death had certainly come at a bad time.

Yet she was somehow involved. Derrick and Tom and Elisa had been living together in a relatively stable situation for the past five years. Even the hanky-panky seemed stable. It had been going on, nice and quiet, for eons. So what had changed in the Reardon household? Why did Derrick suddenly have to die? The only apparent change was Pamela's arrival two months ago.

"I'm sorry, sir, but Miss Pamela doesn't appear to be in her room." The butler had reappeared and was doing his supercilious routine in my direction. "Did you have an appointment?"

"Not exactly. Got any idea when she'll be back?"

"I didn't see Miss Pamela leave. Her automobile is still in the driveway, however, and — what are you doing? Where are you going?"

Where I was going was up the marble staircase two stairs at a time. "I'm going to take a gander at Mr. Reardon's bedroom, if you don't mind." I heard quick footsteps behind me but didn't look around to see if he walked any differently when he was chasing someone. "As long as I'm waiting, I might as well keep busy, right?"

"Please, sir. You can't do this."

I reached the landing and looked for a door with a lot of wall space around it, something befitting a master bedroom. Only two doors were near the stairs, and only one filled the bill. I turned its knob and walked in, Jeeves hard on my heels.

It was Derrick's room, all right. A large, canopied bed with end tables stood against one wall, and there was plenty of room for dancing on the lake-size Oriental carpet. A few ancient choir seats were sprinkled about, evidence of a European buying spree, and a fancy desk stood just opposite the fireplace. The desk drawers were all open, and a teenaged girl with short, auburn hair was sitting on the floor, rummaging through a pile of envelopes and papers.

"Miss Pamela. I'm sorry. This gentleman, Mr. Cavanaugh, called to see you. I assumed you'd gone out and I told—"

"That's all right, Hennesey. Mr. Cavanaugh is the private detective. Uncle Tom hired. Pleased to meet you." She turned in my direction. It was a pleasant, open face with a jawline just a mite too straight to let her be really attractive. She was dressed in a white blouse with a tartan skirt and vest, a school uniform. "You wanted to talk to me?"

"If you've got a minute."

"Anything to help Uncle Tom—and my stepmother. You can go, Hennesey. I'm sure Mr. Cavanaugh knows how to behave."

Hennesey departed without a squawk, although I noticed he left the door open behind him. I played the gentleman and sat halfway across the room on a choir seat. "Read anything good lately?" I couldn't resist.

"Oh, you mean this?" The voice had a friendly, unsophisticated lilt. "It must look strange. As a child, I never had the secret pleasure of sneaking through my father's desk." She took the last few papers from the bottom drawer and added them to the pile. "I suppose I'm making up for lost time. Didn't you ever used to sneak through your father's desk, Mr. Cavanaugh?"

"You can call me Stew. And my father didn't have a desk."

"Stew. Stewart." She rolled the words around in her mouth, enjoying them. I wondered if the wide-eyed teenager was a natural or calculated part of her personality. "I like Stewart. Anyway, there's nothing very interesting. It must be much more fun when you're a kid and things are more mysterious."

"You looking for anything in particular?"

"Not really." She lifted herself up off the floor, dusted her hands on the school tartan, and

joined me on the choir seats. "It would've been a lot nicer if Daddy'd had time to put me in his will. Oh, well—easy come, easy go." She lifted her eyes to meet mine, trying to gauge my reaction. "I can't tell whether you're scandalized or not. You shouldn't be. I'm used to being an orphan."

I told her I wasn't scandalized but that I needed her cooperation if I was going to earn my fee. She told me she'd be glad to help out and where did I want to start. I told her a week and a half ago, on the night of the murder.

It didn't take long. Her version hardly differed from the official line. Yes, Elisa carried the decanter into the dining room and yes, she switched over to water. Yes, Derrick complained of indigestion and yes, the doctor was sent for.

"I'm afraid that's about all I can tell you, Stewart. I got out of there right after dessert. I'm sure you've heard all about my red roadster."

Of course I had. That stupid red roadster was her alibi. It had been a present from Daddy only the week before, her first car. Driving it around was still a big thrill, and she especially enjoyed it at night, speeding down country roads, headlamps biting into the dark. She roared out of the Reardon gates a few minutes before the doctor's ar-

rival at eight thirty. The next time she saw the mansion's gravel driveway it was after ten and the sheriff's car was taking up her normal space.

Now that's the kind of alibi that makes me smack my lips and shine up the magnifying glass. Out for a drive! The death rows of America must be littered with poor saps who thought that would make a good story. But this time, thanks to Pamela's fortunate bad luck, the alibi held.

It was a speeding ticket — issued by a motorcycle cop at five minutes after nine. Pamela had been doing over fifty on a residential road. She pulled to the side and tried to talk her way out of it, and when the officer kept on writing, she entertained him with what he later described as "unladylike language." All of this happened a minute or so after, and over twenty miles away from, the gunshot—that fascinating bullet someone had fired into her father's corpse.

"Sorry I can't be more help." Her eyes were focused on her skirt as she traced its pattern with her forefinger. "They kept us up, the police did, for several hours that night. I remember poor Doc Morfield wandering around the house, trying to keep out of Elisa's way. They never liked each other. Still don't."

"Why not?"

"I don't really know. You should talk to someone who's been here a while. They might know."

"Good idea." I turned and craned my neck towards the open door. "Hennesey!" A rustle of fabric and a creak of the hall floorboards gave him away. "Come in here, Hennesey, I want to ask you a question."

One great thing about butlers; they know how to handle embarrassing situations. Hennesey took two steps from his listening post in the hall and stood there in the open doorway, all of his dignity intact. "Sir?" It was like we had just rung for him. "Yes, sir. I believe you wished to know why Dr. Morfield and Mrs. Reardon are not on good terms."

Pamela was smiling. "I bet you know everything. Don't you, Hennesey?"

"I was with Mr. Reardon for a great many years." That was his way of saying yes. "He and Dr. Morfield were old friends. Before Mrs. Reardon became Mrs. Reardon, Mr. Reardon—"

"Why don't you use first names?"

"Thank you, sir." Hennesey relaxed half a smidgen. "Mr. Derrick and the doctor used to spend an evening or two a week together playing gin, smoking cigars, the things gentlemen do. When Miss Elisa came into

Mr. Reardon's—Mr. Derrick's life—she disapproved of these evenings. One might suggest jealousy, although not in the way the word is normally used. She talked Mr. Derrick out of his regular pastime. Miss Elisa can be quite a forceful woman. Rather than argue, he gave in."

"And that's why Elisa and the doc don't get along. Sounds reasonable." I got up from the choir seat and began pacing the bedroom, my little trick for making a man nervous. I'd just stumbled across the reason for Derrick's regular bouts of indigestion and I needed confirmation. "But if I'd been your employer, Hennesey, I don't think I'd have let a disapproving wife stop me from having a good time with an old friend."

"It's the truth, sir."

"I would have found some way of doing it behind her back. Like maybe I would pretend to get indigestion a couple of times a month so this old friend, let's say he's a doctor, could come over with his black bag. And maybe there'd be a deck of cards in that black bag of his, and maybe a couple of cigars."

"Really, sir!" I loved Hennesey. Completely unflappable, even when you caught him. "Mr. Reardon provided the cigars, like any good host."

A trace of a smile crossed his lips. "You're quite right. I didn't feel it my place to reveal their

little secret, but now that you've guessed . . . It was a code between them, all very harmless, you know. Mr. Reardon would complain of some minor malady and call for Dr. Morfield. The examination, so to speak, would take place in the library. They both derived great enjoyment from that little deception of theirs."

"What about you, Hennesey? Were you privy to that little deception?"

"Not officially, no. But a good butler always knows what's going on under his roof." The trace of a smile was gone. "If I may anticipate your next question, sir; no, I have not mentioned this habit of theirs to the police."

"And why not?"

"It hardly seems worth it. The usual duration of a library examination was perhaps two hours. On the night of the murder, however, they were together only fifteen minutes, hardly enough time for a card game. It seems more plausible to me that Mr. Reardon was actually suffering from stomach cramps and that the doctor treated him, just as he testified. After all, sir, they did find the poison in his dinner wine."

"Yeah. And if anything could give you indigestion, I imagine poison could."

"Quite, sir." Another trace of a smile crossed the butler's lips.

I had him in stitches, I could tell.

**M**y eyes had closed for a second, tired of looking at the index cards, when the annoying little cuckoo went into its nine P.M. performance. What kind of a sadist would put cuckoo clocks in a motor inn? I guess it was atmosphere. The clock, the dark wood walls, and the bits of chalet-style trim were all supposed to justify the name, Black Forest Motor Lodge. Max had made the reservations by phone. She's a sucker for a cute name.

They were spread all over the chintz bedspread, dozens of index cards, each with a fact or a name or a feeling. Some people work from notebooks, and some sit back and gaze at the sky. The only way I can figure out a problem is with cards. I lay them out like toy soldiers and keep rearranging them until I come up with a theory that every little piece fits into. Then I yell "Bingo" and tear them up.

Bingo had come several hours earlier. That wasn't the problem. The problem was proving it. Derrick's killer had been lucky, and a damn fast thinker. And no matter how I rearranged things, it still looked as though I'd be needing Sheriff Kiley's help.

A car was pulling up, the headlamps shining through the

cabin window. Like a gambler raking in the chips, I gathered all the index cards together and tossed them under the bed. I get self-conscious about my cards.

Max walked in without knocking. "I brought him, boss. No problem. Say, you've got a cuckoo clock, too. Cute place, huh?"

"The little lady tells me you want to work out a deal." Sheriff Kiley entered the cabin behind Max and closed the door. Only a complete idiot would refer to Max as a little lady, so it looked as if I wouldn't have to change my first impression.

"Thanks for coming. Here, sit down." I pushed a chair in his direction, one of those woodsy things made of tree branches with cushions tied on, one for the back and one for the seat.

He sat. "I want to get this straight from the start," he said. "If I go along with you, Cavanaugh, and if your theory happens to be right—and I'm not saying you are right, but there's always that chance—then I handle it my way. No interference from you. No talking to the press. No taking credit."

"I just want to get them out of jail and cash their check."

"Smart fellow." Kiley crossed his lanky legs. If you squinted, they resembled extra branches of that woodsy chair. "The only reason I'm even considering you might be right is that infor-

mation the little lady here came up with. Tell you the truth, it kind of sent me for a loop."

Max is a wonder, all right. My half hour with Pamela had piqued my curiosity. When I left the mansion, Pamela's school photo was no longer in a silver frame on Derrick's dresser. It was under my jacket.

I had caught up with Max at the *Sentinel* and told her what I wanted. A minute later she'd sweet-talked her friend into lending her an office and a telephone on the understanding we would reimburse them for the long distance charges.

All I'd given her was a photo and a handful of information, not that I wanted a miracle in return. Not really. I just wanted a small hole in Pamela's past.

By the time offices started closing along the East Coast, Max had done it, and not just a small hole. We'd have to mail out copies of the photo and wait for documents in return, but the chances were better than even that the Reardons had an impostor on their hands.

Kiley was still a doubter, but he was also the kind who likes to cover all the exits. "Hard to think she's a fake. I remember quizzing her at the orphanage. She knew all about her mother, what she looked like, even scratchy memories of her dad, things he did with her, how the place used to look."

"She could have been trained."

"I suppose. But why kill him now? The payoff wouldn't come till after he changed the will."

"But suppose Derrick had found her out. That kind of behavior is still a crime, isn't it?"

I slapped on my humble expression just so he wouldn't take offense. Then I told him about my plan for the next morning. Looking back, maybe there was a way to do it without confiding in that bumpkin. But a lady's life was at stake, and I'd learned a long time ago not to put my ego before my client.

I escorted Kiley the length of the dirt parking lot and we shook hands beside his car. "See you in the morning, Cavanaugh. I'll swing by the mansion on my way home and have a word with Hennesey, tell him I'm onto a new development and he should cooperate with you."

"Don't give him any hints."

"'Course not. Oh, you should take care of that bullet business now, while you got a peace officer on the premises. How about over there in the trees? And we should use my gun and a police issue bullet just to make it more official."

I didn't understand his logic, but it was probably a good idea. We walked a few hundred feet into the woods, and Kiley's gun came out of its holster. He aimed at a solid old oak a good dis-



tance away and squeezed the trigger. The guy could shoot, I had to give him that.

The echo reverberated through the trees and I expected a few curious souls back at the motor lodge to pop their heads out. But all remained motionless, like a painting.

Kiley smiled at his handiwork. "You got a penknife on you?" I shook my head. "That's the trouble with you city boys. You just don't come prepared." The cadaver smile still on his face, Kiley took out his own penknife as we made our way over to the injured oak.

I drove up to the Reardon mansion at ten to nine the next morning after having dropped off an angry Max at the sheriff's office. She'd wanted to be in on the kill, so to speak, but I was afraid too many people might botch it up.

I had my few words with Hennesey, and he seemed to understand. I was in the library when Dr. Morfield showed up a few minutes later. Hennesey introduced us and was about to leave when I stopped him. "Before I forget—I wanted to ask about these fireplaces—how often are they raked out?"

"Every morning, sir, if there's been a fire the night before."

I glanced at the library fireplace and saw that it was still full of ashes and charred wood.

Hennesey followed my glance. "Yes, well—unfortunately, things have been a bit topsyturvy since Mr. Reardon's death. With just Miss Pamela in the house, I thought it best to let some of the maids go. I'm afraid little chores like emptying fireplaces have gone wanting."

"I see." Taking a poker, I casually rummaged through the black ash. "Then the last time the grates were emptied was—"

"Not since the day of the murder. Of course the police emptied the grate in the master bedroom and sifted the ashes. And fires have been set every night in the drawing room and Miss Pamela's bedroom, so those are cleaned out regularly. But as for the others—"

"I understand. Thank you, Hennesey."

He bowed in his best supercilious manner—I was getting used to it by now—and closed the library door behind him.

This was the first I'd seen of Dr. Morfield. He was in his mid-fifties with a mane of white hair combed back in a rather distinguished style. The face was clean-shaven and devoid of wrinkles except for small creases around the eyes. A friendly man by the look of it.

"The village is buzzing about you, Mr. Cavanaugh, I'm sure you know. When I was making my rounds yesterday, your name was all I heard. Are you going

to be here long?" Before I could answer he laughed in a gentle, self-deprecating way. "What I suppose I really meant was, are you making progress? Your length of stay will be determined by your progress, correct?"

"Progress could be faster. That's why I wanted to talk. I read over your testimony from the inquest and had a question or two."

I hesitated, and Morfield was quick to pick up the ball. "My dear man, no need for you to be embarrassed. I realize your job is to find another explanation. And my testimony did turn out to be fairly damning." He sat himself in an armchair. "I'll be glad to go over it as many times as you like."

"Excuse me, Mr. Cavanaugh." Hennesey stood in the doorway. "Sheriff Kiley is here. He'd like a word with you. I told him you were with the doctor, but he says it's urgent."

"By all means, go ahead. I'm in no rush this morning." A certain excitement showed for just a second in the doctor's grey eyes. "I'll wait here. Say hello to Sheriff Kiley. And take as long as you like."

I excused myself and walked out of the library with Hennesey, closing the door behind us. Sheriff Kiley was waiting in the hall. My finger was up to my lips for several seconds, un-

til after we heard the key turn in the lock.

"He's locked himself in," Kiley whispered.

"He'll open it when he's ready."

"Did he take the bait? I don't know about this harebrained idea of yours, Cavanaugh."

"He took it, all right. He couldn't wait for me to get out of there."

"It had to be him, didn't it?" The cadaver smile was back on Kiley's lips. "Who else could have faked Pamela's birth certificate and medical records? It also had to be someone who knew the family and could tell her the right things to say."

Hennesey was whispering like the rest of us. "Do you mean it was Dr. Morfield, sir, and not Mrs. Reardon?"

Kiley puffed out his chest, draped his arm over the butler's shoulder, and led him into the drawing room. "Let me tell you how I solved it." You could see this was just a rehearsal. The real performance was going to be to a roomful of reporters. "I was never happy with Elisa Reardon, but I had to arrest her because of the evidence, and also to put Morfield off his guard."

"You see, his original plan was to push the girl on Reardon, convincing him she was his daughter, Pamela. As soon as she was in the will, the old

family doctor would kill him and they'd split the inheritance. That was the plan. But Reardon must have found out."

"Then Mr. Reardon's attack of indigestion was just one of their signals?" Hennesey turned to me, full of chagrin. "I'm terribly sorry, sir."

"That's all right," I said. "Your boss wanted to confront Morfield with the facts, that's why he called him over. The wine wasn't poisoned until long after dinner."

"Cavanaugh." The sheriff was growling. "I'll handle this." His arm went around Hennesey's shoulder again as he led the butler farther away. "Of course, the doctor must have had some idea the jig was up; otherwise he wouldn't have brought the gun and poison in his black bag. I can't say exactly what happened when Reardon confronted him, but somehow the doc managed to get the poison into him when they were alone."

"What about the gunshot, sir?"

"That's the part I got right. I mean—" Kiley recovered quickly. "I mean that's the part I got right off. It was a bullet heated up in a fireplace, like I said, only it was the library fireplace. Morfield was alone in there, remember?"

I wish I could say my ego wasn't hurting, but it was. Explaining the solution is my fa-

vorite part. "Of course, your real clues were the left hand and the burning pillow." That was my little dig. "Tell him about that, sheriff."

There was a moment of silence as Kiley's mouth fell open. Then, just as quickly, it snapped back into place. "No, Cavanaugh." The voice was icy. "You tell him about that. It sounds better if someone else blows my horn."

"Be glad to." If I couldn't make Kiley look like an idiot, at least I could make him feel like one. "Morfield was the only one to approach the body. He said Derrick had been shot and told Tom to take Elisa downstairs. When he was alone, he took out the gun and shot Derrick in the side of the head no one had seen, the left side. The doc then took the pillow he'd used to cushion the sound and threw it into the fire."

A revelation dawned on Kiley's face. "So that's why Miss Elisa didn't smell that stench. She'd only been in the room once, before Dr. Morfield had burned it."

"Isn't he brilliant, Hennesey!" I was enjoying myself.

Kiley turned a bright red. "Thank you, Cavanaugh." He said it with enthusiasm, if not sincerity, and it took him a few seconds to cool down. "Anyway, that's the story. Morfield wanted the whole thing to look like su-

icide. But when I came on the scene—well, he knew there'd be an autopsy, and that's when he drugged the wine. He had to make the poisoning look like it happened before he got there."

"Well done, sir." Hennesey was duly impressed. "And I imagine our charade this morning is some trick or other to gather evidence?" That's what reminded us to go back to the library.

The door was unlocked. Morfield was sitting in an armchair, still smug and distinguished if you didn't look closely at his hands. Kiley put the cuffs on those sooty hands, then searched the doctor's pockets. The shell from Kiley's police issue bullet was in Morfield's tweed jacket, and that about clinched it.

If Morfield had been thinking clearly, he would have known Hennesey was too efficient a butler to allow a fireplace to go uncleaned for over a week.

We drove to the sheriff's office in two cars. My clients were released and a deputy was sent to the local day school to pick up a.k.a. Pamela.

Kiley was ushering us out the door when the first reporter arrived, Max's friend. I had no comment.

The celebration was back at the mansion. Hennesey poured champagne and everyone drank, even though it was too early. Tom was beaming and kissing everyone and talking marriage while Elisa was playing it down. I saw what she was feeling. When you're suddenly rich, a fellow millionaire just doesn't have the same appeal he used to.

Max was sitting by the window, a drained glass in her hand. She'd tacked a smile on her face, but that was just to be polite. I grabbed an open champagne bottle, strolled over to her side, and played butler.

"Thanks, boss." She took a sip and let the smile fall off. "I told you the smart money was on Kiley."

"Hey," I said, sitting on the arm of her chair. There are volumes in one of my "heys," but this time it didn't seem to work. I took Tom's check out of my back pocket and waved it. "How about a paid vacation? You could use one."

That did it. Max was in a good mood all the way home. And so was I until we entered Manhattan. It wasn't until then I remembered that my coat and hat were still hanging up in Sheriff Kiley's office.

FICTION

# The Double Invasion

by Jo Anne Howell

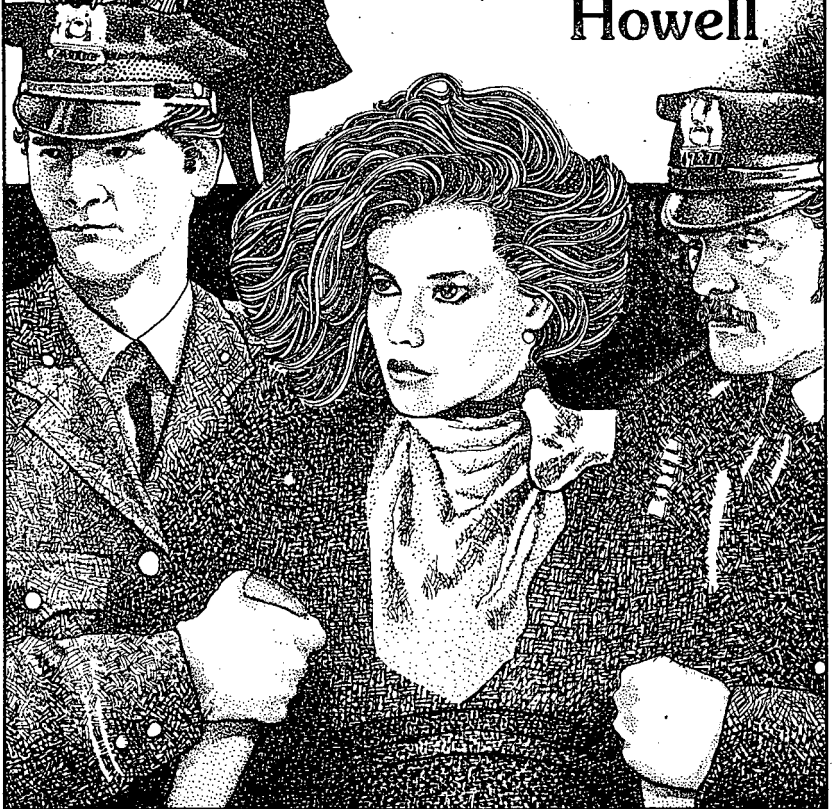


Illustration by Kurt Wallace

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Sarah Williams had to leave the office that day on her lunch hour, rush down to the dime store, and buy some Halloween decorations for her daughters' party. The store was jammed, the decorations were picked over and junky-looking, and she didn't have time to shop around. There was an auditor from the State Tax Department coming to work today, to go over all the payroll records since 1979. And since Sarah was the bookkeeper, she had to be there. So she grabbed a bunch of limp cardboard witches and skeletons, and took her place in the checkout line.

And that was when she saw the woman. She felt all the air rush out of her, and she thought she might faint. She might as well have, for this stranger, standing three people back from the cash register, was all that Sarah was aware of.

The woman looked exactly like Sarah. The same brownish hair tapping on her shoulders, the same crow's feet around the same dark eyes. Her forehead was short, her cheekbones high, just like Sarah's. She had wrinkles around a mouth too small for her face, like Sarah. It was remarkable. It was like looking into a mirror. She even had the same mannerisms. She held her head cocked slightly to the side, she reached up and twisted a chunk of hair around her finger just as Sarah did a hundred times a day. The man in front of her turned to say something, and Sarah watched the woman smile, her own smile that crinkled up the eyes and showed the same slightly crooked teeth.

It was uncanny. It gave her cold shivers, and yet she was fascinated.

Even the clothes were the same. Flowered print blouse, tan skirt that buttoned up the front, nylons, low-heeled sandals. The same over-the-shoulder bag. Sarah had an urge to grab the bag and rip through it, to see if it held the same junk as her own.

It was the woman's turn at the cash register and as she moved up to the counter, her skirt flipped and Sarah saw a run, there at the back of the knee. Then she remembered her own nylons. The only pair she could find that morning had a run in it. It stopped just behind the knee, exactly like the one she stared at now. She felt light-headed and strangely like laughing.

"Something profound is happening," she thought. "I am not looking at someone who just resembles me, who just happens to be wearing the same identical clothes. I am looking at my double." If she did grab the woman's bag and pull out her wallet, the same pictures of husband and children would be there. This woman was Sarah Williams.



"And if so," she thought, "who am I?" She felt nauseated and closed her eyes. Any moment now Rod Serling would step out from the line and say: "Sarah Williams, thirty-two years old, mother of two daughters, wife of Alan Williams, bookkeeper for Cloud Nine Crop Dusters, Inc., went out for a quick errand on her lunch hour, and although she doesn't know it yet, she has just entered 'The Twilight Zone.'"

When she opened her eyes again, the woman was putting away her change. Dumping it into the bottom of her purse, just as Sarah always did. She picked up her bag and walked toward the door, hurrying as if she had to get back to work. The skirt flipped up once more, revealing the run.

She was out the door before Sarah realized it.

"Wait! Wait!" she cried out. Several people turned around, but not the woman. She continued out the door.

Sarah thought of only one thing. Stop her. Don't let her get away. Leaving her place in line, she dashed out the door after her and looked both ways quickly. The woman was halfway up the block, heading up Main Street; Sarah could just see her.

"Wait! Stop!" she called, and was about to run after her when she was grabbed from behind. "Let go of me, you idiot!" she snarled at her assailant, and "Wait! Please!" to the disappearing woman. But it was too late. With an unaccountable feeling of loss, Sarah watched the woman round the corner of the Sears building and disappear.

"Who are you and what do you want?" she demanded to the person who held her arms in huge burly mitts.

"It's called petty theft, ma'am," he said. "Would you mind coming back into the store?"

**A**lan Williams was furious with his wife. To her face he was polite and sympathetic enough. But just underneath, he thought the whole episode was ridiculous and embarrassing, and her timing was atrocious. He was running for the board of supervisors and absolutely could not afford to have a wife arrested for petty theft. And then the outlandish story she'd cooked up, just to add to the humiliation. He cringed as he recalled the desk sergeant.

But right now wasn't the time to talk about it. In half an hour there would be ten little girls here, ready for Halloween and wanting to be scared and thrilled and stuffed with sugar.

And he wasn't going to let this party be clouded by his wife's

dramatics. He scowled as he buttoned up the back of his daughter's pirate costume.

What an embarrassment. First the phone call from the police station. He'd thought it was a joke. He'd had to drop everything, make up lame excuses about an emergency, and rush down there. And then dealing with that smug desk sergeant was the topper.

"It was just some Halloween decorations," the sergeant had said with a huge grin. "And she had plenty enough money in her purse to pay for them."

"I don't understand. You mean she tried to steal some decorations? I don't believe it. Where is my wife?"

"She'll be here in a minute. And you'd better start believing it. Ran right out of the store with them and was running up the street when the security guard nabbed her."

"There must be some explanation."

"Oh, she had an explanation all right, and I must say, all the years I been on the force, I thought I'd heard them all. But this was a new one on me." And he smirked.

"Well, what was it?" Alan snapped impatiently.

"Claims she saw a vision, her 'double.'" The sergeant paused to let this absurdity sink in, then continued. "Her double, you know? Some lady that looked just like her, and acted just like her. In fact, your wife claimed she *was* her. And she had to run out after the lady to find out who *she* was! Now, doesn't that beat anything you've heard today?" And the sergeant guffawed.

Alan had just stared at him, suffered his buffoonery and rudeness in cold silence. Then he asked if there were papers he had to sign for her release. The sergeant stopped his laughing, but the smirk remained.

"She's released on her own recognizance, meaning she doesn't have to post bail, but she'd sure better show up for her arraignment next Monday morning. Here's the time and place." He handed Alan a form with the information. "You know, we've had a lot of these middle-class housewives lately, trying to sneak out with little things. Maybe it's just their way of adding some excitement to their lives, you know, an element of risk."

Alan didn't answer him. He folded the paper and put it in his pocket, then sat down in the seat farthest away from the desk.

Finally a matron brought Sarah in. She didn't say anything in the office, and once in the car with him, she was subdued and hesitant. She explained about seeing this woman in the store, and

some silly thing about a run in her nylon that proved everything, and how she ran out of the store after her.

"I don't even know what I would have said to her if I had caught her," she said. "And then the security guard was just awful. He wouldn't listen to me at all. I offered to pay, I offered to put the decorations back, I apologized all over the place. I tried to explain that it was just a mistake, that I'd had no intentions of stealing the stupid decorations. And he just snickered. Said it was out of his hands, he was just doing his job, and for me to explain all that to the police. And then the police were even worse. They had a wonderful time poking fun at me." Her voice cracked and she stopped talking.

Alan felt some of his anger leave him. She'd obviously had a bad time with it. Well, they would talk later tonight. He would explain to her how important her image was to him right now, one week before election day. She could plead guilty, pay a fine, and let the whole thing blow quietly away.

They picked up the girls from the babysitter and drove home. Sarah immediately started making cupcakes while he helped Jessica and Jeanine with their costumes.

The girls were bursting with excitement. They were like two birds chattering and scolding and twittering.

"Linda and Susan are coming for sure," Jeanine chirped. "But I don't know about Sharon. I hope she comes. Oh wow, Mommy. Are you making more cupcakes? Oh wow. We're going to have a lot!"

"I'm only making a dozen, Jeanine." Alan could hear the tiredness in her voice.

"But there's a whole bunch more in the fridge!" Jeanine squealed happily.

Sarah turned around to stare at her, then opened the refrigerator and stared into it. Jeanine babbled on, but Alan wasn't listening any more. He was watching his wife, and a strange feeling of dread was crawling up his throat.

Sarah lifted a tray of twelve beautifully-decorated Halloween cupcakes out of the refrigerator and set it on the table.

"I didn't make these," she said quietly.

"Yes you did, Mommy," Jeanine sang up. "You told me you were going to make them last night when I was going to bed."

"I didn't, though," Sarah said. "I was too tired and I decided to make them tonight."

"Well, you must have made them in your sleep then, and now

you don't remember," Alan volunteered with forced cheerfulness. Jeanine was happy with that, and went on listing the names of expected guests.

But Sarah still stared at the cupcakes. She looked as if she might start crying.

Sarah left for work Monday morning full of good intentions. She would apologize and make an act of contrition. She was prepared to tell her boss the truth: she saw the woman and blanked out everything else, she chased her out of the store, she was arrested for shoplifting. She was allowed only one phone call, and used that to call her husband. She hadn't thought about work, the state auditors coming, anything, until later as she waited for Alan to come. And by the time she was released, it was after five o'clock. She had thought many times during the weekend that she should call her boss at home, but hesitated. It was a hard story to tell over the phone.

But when she got to work, she had a different reception from the one she expected.

"About Friday, Maggie . . ." she had started.

"You were wonderful! You handled her beautifully. Every other year Greg and I have gotten into such battles with these stupid payroll auditors. They're always so condescending to us; and so superior. I swear, Sarah, it must be your natural sweetness, or sincerity, but you sure had that lady agreeing with everything you told her."

Sarah was stunned. "Really?" was all she could answer.

"This is the first year in fifteen years of running this business that we haven't been charged some outrageous penalty for not withholding taxes on some idiot. Last year we were charged for some guy that did our advertising, can you believe it? Some guy who came to us, gave us a fee for doing some layouts. We assumed he was in business for himself. We weren't employing him, just hiring his services, like a doctor or lawyer. You pay them; do you withhold taxes from that? Of course not. But it seems we were supposed to ask if he had a business license, demand to see it. He didn't pay taxes on his money, so we got fined. I still get mad just thinking about it. Anyway, thanks to you, Sarah, we don't have to go through any of that this year. I wanted to thank you on Friday, but I didn't get a chance. In fact, Greg and I decided we wanted you to have a little bonus." And she pressed a crisp new hundred dollar bill into Sarah's hand.

Sarah tried to remain calm and reasonable. Obviously that same woman had gone there Friday afternoon and posed as Sarah. "She is trying to take over my life," she thought. But no, that was too melodramatic. Why would anyone want her quiet, dull little life?

She examined her life for some motive. She had been married for eleven years to Alan, a very nice man. Could this woman be after him? She had twin daughters, age seven, that were a delight to her, but a reason for this absurd plot to steal her life? She had a wonderful job, wonderful bosses, but hardly great enough to warrant this masquerading. Her parents had both died some years before, and as far as she knew, she was not in line to inherit any vast fortune from some long-forgotten aunt. Her life was very special to her, but no, she couldn't see anything so great that someone else would want it.

She stuck the hundred dollar bill into an envelope and hid it in the bottom drawer of her desk. How could she take it when she hadn't been there? Then she told Maggie that she had to run into town for a bit.

She got to the courthouse, found the room where they were hearing arraignments, and sat down. Alan had told her to plead guilty. Guilty of shoplifting. Pay a fine and get it over with. But the words stuck in her throat. She wasn't guilty of shoplifting. Didn't shoplifting require that you have the intention of stealing something? She certainly didn't intend to steal those silly decorations. And she didn't want a conviction of theft on any record. She was a book-keeper, for heaven's sake, a job that required absolute honesty and trustworthiness. Didn't she have enough problems without a criminal record? No, she decided. In spite of her husband's political aspirations, she couldn't plead guilty to something she didn't really do. When they called her name, she would plead not guilty, explain to the judge, and let him decide.

But they never called her name. She sat for two hours in the stuffy courtroom, listening to people pleading guilty or not, getting dates set for their sentencing or trials, but they never called for Sarah Williams. When they broke for lunch, Sarah approached the bailiff and asked if there would be more arraignments after lunch.

"Nope. That's it for today."

"But I was told to come here this morning. I can't keep taking time off work just to hang around here and wait."

"What's your name, ma'am?" This guy was much nicer than her friends of last Friday. She told him her name and he scanned his list. "Sorry, no one by that name. You'd better go downstairs to

the district attorney's office and see if they have a complaint filed against you. Sometimes they forget to give us everything."

So she went downstairs to the district attorney's office. They also had nothing. They, in turn, sent her to the police department, to see if they had any paperwork on her.

She dreaded going into the police department, seeing again the smug faces and sneers of those protectors of society. But when she entered the station, there wasn't a familiar face in it. And they, also, didn't have any paperwork on her. As far as the legal system was concerned, Sarah Williams didn't exist.

She called her husband from a phone booth. He wouldn't believe her. "Sarah, we both know that's impossible. I want you to go back into that courtroom at one o'clock and explain to the judge what happened, and that you're pleading guilty. I want this whole thing over with. Do you understand that?"

"Alan, I've tried. They don't have any complaint against me. And besides. . ."

"And besides what?"

"Well, even if they did find my paperwork, well, I didn't intend to steal anything, and I don't want a criminal record, and I've decided not to plead guilty."

"Sarah, we went all through this." He said it in a very controlled voice, and she could tell he was furious. "I can't have this kind of publicity right before the election. You agreed with me. Now, you go back into the courtroom and. . ."

"Alan, I'm not going back there. It doesn't matter any more. They can't find any complaint on me, so it'll blow over even faster than you were hoping. In fact, maybe it never happened. Maybe it was all just in our imaginations."

"Sarah, you are not making sense. I know for a fact that I had to leave work early last Friday and suffer through the ridicule of some officious pig of a sergeant. I did not imagine that. And you certainly didn't imagine spending Friday afternoon in the slammer. Now, stop this nonsense and. . ."

"Alan, there's more. Maggie and Greg think I was at work on Friday afternoon. They congratulated me on what a wonderful job I did with the state auditor and gave me a hundred dollar bonus."

"Sarah, are you crazy?" he boomed across the phone wires. "Are you losing your mind?"

She didn't know how to answer. "Alan, something very strange is happening. Someone is going around posing as me. She's trying to steal my life, take over my place."

"This is absurd. I don't have time to deal with this." He was very matter-of-fact now, all business. "You go back into that courtroom and get this straightened out. I'll talk to you tonight." And he hung up.

Sarah hung up the dead phone, wishing she could wake up from this nightmare. She looked out of the phone booth down the busy noontime street. Such an ordinary street, full of ordinary people rushing around on their lunch hour. She longed to be one of them.

Then she saw the woman. Way down at the end of the street, standing there as if she was waiting for someone. Sarah pushed open the door of the booth and hurried toward her.

**A**lan Williams left work with a headache and a briefcase full of notes about tomorrow's press conference. It would take him hours of reading tonight, organizing his thoughts, preparing answers to all possible questions the reporters might ask, rebuttals to his opponent's statements. He didn't have time to deal with his wife's nervous breakdown.

And he was sure that was what was happening. Too much stress, he figured. Well, if she could just do it quietly, not make a public spectacle of herself, maybe it would be okay. She was right about one thing: he had called the D.A.'s office and they really didn't have any record of a Sarah Williams being picked up for shoplifting. Undoubtedly the paperwork had been lost somewhere. It was too good to be true. Just plain good luck.

As to her being at work on Friday afternoon, he assumed there was some explanation. He knew that if he had the time to talk with her boss, talk to the state auditor's office, he could track down what happened. Since he didn't have the time, he dismissed the problem and stewed over the more important one: his wife's breakdown just five days before the election. Maybe he could suggest a vacation for her, send her up to her sister in Seattle, get her out of the area until after the election. He could do it tactfully, he thought. He pulled up in his driveway, preparing his speech to her: he was worried about her, a little vacation might be just what she needed.

But when Sarah opened the door for him, she didn't look as if she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. In fact, she was a picture of radiant health. Glowing, smiling, happy to see him. It was hard to imagine her the same woman who only a few hours ago had whined to him in that quavering, weak voice.

"You've certainly perked up," he commented.



"Oh, I'm just so happy it's all over. Every piece of paper on me has literally disappeared. It's such a load off my mind. I wish you could believe me."

"I believe you. I called the D.A.'s office myself this afternoon."

"Isn't it wonderful? It's just like a miracle. I can barely believe my good luck. And I want you to know how sorry I am for causing you all this trouble and worry. I don't know what happened, but it's over now, and I'll make it up to you, I promise."

"What about the stranger who took over your job Friday afternoon?"

"I don't know. I just don't know, but I'm not going to dwell on it. What difference does it make? None. And besides, we don't have time to go chasing after ghosts. We have to get you ready for election day. Don't you have a press conference tomorrow morning?"

"Yes."

"I got you a present with my surprise bonus. I hope you like it." She grabbed a bag and pulled out her present. An expensive sky-blue, longsleeved dress shirt. A wonderful shade of blue. It would match his eyes perfectly. It would photograph perfectly.

"And this to go with it." She drew out a navy blue, narrow silk tie, very conservative and tasteful. Exactly what the occasion called for. He was speechless.

"Do you like them?"

"Yes, yes. I'm just overwhelmed. All this is such a surprise, such a change from our phone conversation this noon."

"Oh, Alan, I've been such a worry and a bother to you. I'm so sorry."

She made it up to him all that evening. She kept the girls quiet so he could work, fed them in the kitchen, and sent them off to bed. Then she pored over his papers with him, posed as a reporter and shot questions to him. She helped him memorize statistics that would be useful, facts and figures and pieces of history that might come in handy. He was stunned with relief at the change in her. If there were tiny little things about her that didn't seem right, just a little off, he pushed them out of his mind. It was wonderful to have his old Sarah back again.

The next morning, dressed in his new clothes, he was a roaring success at the press conference. His opponent had looked weak, ill-prepared, ignorant on major issues. All Sarah's prompting and prodding had set him way ahead.

She deserved a reward, he thought, as he left the TV station at

noon. Some special gift to show his appreciation. Maybe a colorful silk scarf to add a little dash to her. She did have a tendency to look a bit dowdy. A bright colorful silk scarf would be just the thing.

He stopped at a little boutique in the mall and found what he wanted. A soft crimson scarf with swirls of white. It would be perfect with her brown hair and dark eyes. He took it up to the saleslady.

And that was when he saw the man. He looked exactly like Alan. Same blue eyes, same height, same weight, same sky-blue shirt and narrow navy tie. The same impatient scowl on his face. It was like looking into a mirror. Alan felt all the air rush out of him, and he thought he might faint. As he watched, the man reached out his hand to pick up his change. And there on the back of his wrist was the same scar that Alan had. A scar caused when his daughter accidentally gouged him with the claw end of a hammer over three years ago. It was remarkable.

And then, as the man hurriedly left the store, Alan dashed out after him, still clutching the crimson silk scarf.

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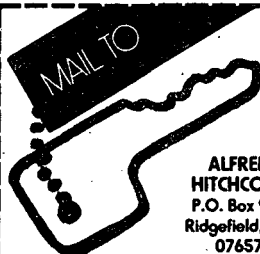
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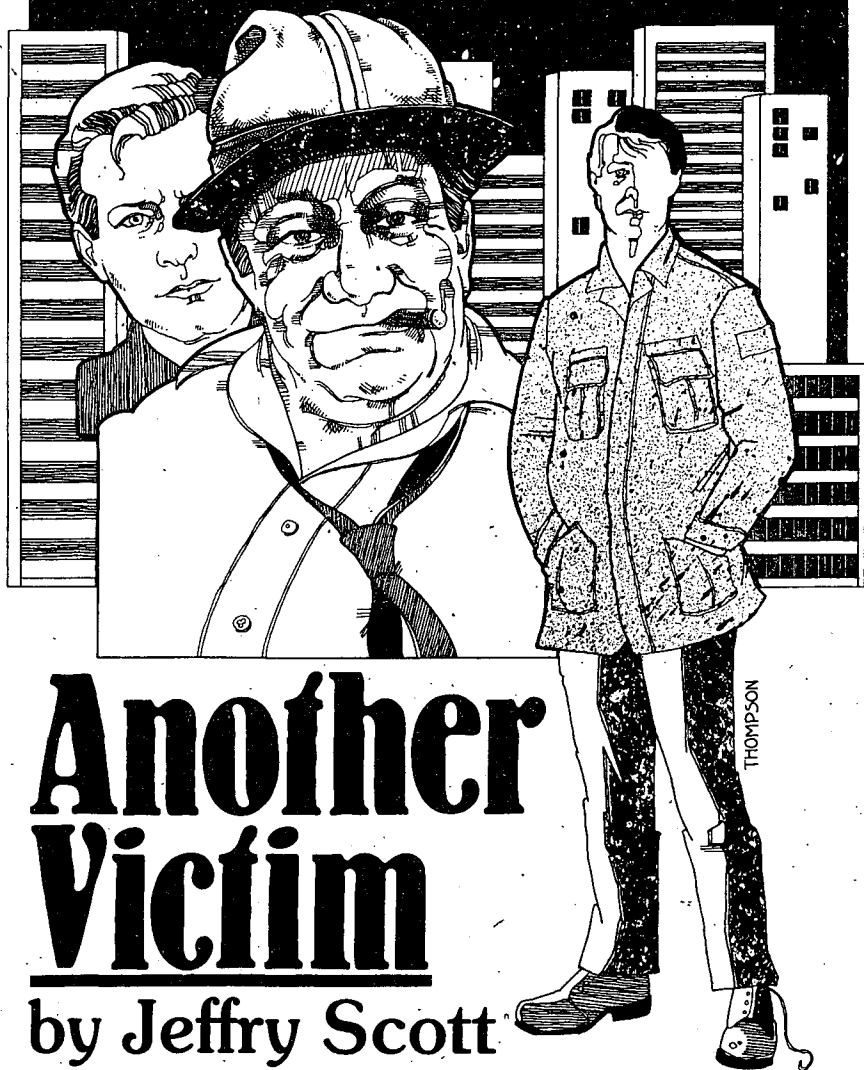
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# Another Victim

by Jeffry Scott

*Illustration by George Thompson.*

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Detective's shield still pristine, fragile self-esteem less shiny, Hal Gordon wasn't enjoying his lessons.

Main reason for that was the pain in his right ankle, bruised and starting to lose skin. Because every so often Max Mallard would kick it, nagging, "Read the street, kid. *Read* the sucker! You got these big eyes drawing attention to us, but you aren't seeing zip."

Kicks or no, Max Mallard made young Gordon nervous. Mallard did crazy stuff; when he deigned to explain what it was about, that was worse because you felt a dummy for not working it out.

Like that morning. Undercover assignment, and Hal had been ready. He hadn't shaved for forty-eight hours; his sandy hair was greasy and unkempt instead of clean and unruly. His cheap lumberjacket, searched for in trashcans, was glazed with dirt, and the jeans could walk places on their own.

Whereas Max Mallard simply hung up his suit coat, switched the .38 snubnose to an ankle rig, rolled his sleeves to the elbows, yanked the stringy tie down half an inch. Then he dropped a clove of garlic on the locker-room floor, crushed it

with his heel, and massaged some of the pulp behind his ears and around his jowls, for all the world like aftershave.

Hal's reaction made Max Mallard sigh irritably. "Make people sick to their stummicks, they blank you out. They don't want to see you, let alone ask where you're coming from, right? Beats hell out of a false beard and a Hollywood wardrobe."

Well, Hal Gordon reflected spitefully, Max Mallard had a head start on looking like a credible street person. A couple of grocery sacks overweight, with the appropriate waddling walk. Pallid face with strong beard shadow, though freshly shaved: an uncooked biscuit picked off a coal-dusted floor.

"Nothing's funny unless I make a joke, kid." Max Mallard drove a surprisingly angular elbow into Hal's ribs, by way of a change. "Pay attention, is that so much to ask? Read—"

"The street," Hal agreed resignedly. "It's wrong when I look and wrong when I don't."

Max Mallard said: "If this was easy work, anyone could do it. You want Mr. Nice Guy, I'm all out of that. Do it the way I say, you might learn something of value. Your choice, I could care less."

"You're *not* Mr. Nice Guy?"

Hey, and here I was thinking—”

Max Mallard stopped so abruptly that Hal collided with him. For a second Hal feared he'd gone too far, too soon. Max Mallard had a rep in the precinct for wisdom and guile. And also as a bestower of fat lips.

But all he muttered was, “Light me, kid, and make it last.” He was holding out three inches of tired cigar. Hal Gordon noticed, for the first time, that Max Mallard might have been wearing gloves, so filthy were the pudgy hands. Hal cursed himself for having clean ones as he fumbled at a limp matchbook.

“What d’you make of that?” Max Mallard demanded.

They were in a quiet backwater near the river, a scrap of the 59th Street Bridge visible. A shabby, not quite defeated neighborhood of brownstones punctuated by what had been modernistic apartment blocks, soon after VJ Day, before cars had fins and lost them again.

Several brownstones were converted into stores and workshops at ground level. A gaunt, grey-haired fellow, eagle face smeared with fresh smudges of artist’s color like warpaint, had emerged from the folk-art gallery and was beckoning.

The gesture brought a husky kid from the nearby alley—wide

shoulders, straw hair, a shambling-puppy air despite the height and muscle. His fists were thrust deep into the front pockets of a combat jacket. The gallery man thrust a slip of paper—or maybe a small package—into the unzipped top pocket of the combat jacket, slapped the youth’s solid shoulder. Immediately the young man set off towards Second Avenue at a trot.

What struck Hal Gordon was the speed of the transaction, and its unobtrusive quality. Unless you’d been looking, it might not have happened . . .

“I guess,” he started, but Max Mallard laughed unkindly.

“Forget it. I just wanted you to be aware of Jaimie Milius, you ever run across him in future. That’s the Incredible Hulk; the painter’s name I don’t remember.”

“He’s dangerous?”

“No,” Max Mallard said patiently. “That’s why you should be aware of him. Big kid, looks tough, apt to get confused when stuff comes down fast. You’re bright, Gordon, you can figure situations where that would be bad for Jaimie.”

Chewing the still unlit cigar, Max Mallard mused, “’Course, Jaimie’s no kid. He must be . . . hell, pushing thirty-five, maybe more. Looks like he only

just graduated from high school, right?"

Intrigued, Hal Gordon assented, "Peter Pan, huh?"

Max Mallard shrugged, expression bleak. "Not nearly, Mr. Gordon. Vietnam. Jaimie's point man stepped on a mine. Blew most of the patrol away—Jaimie's luck ran out, he survived."

He waddled on for half a block, gave Hal a sly glance. "Yes, I got that straight. Oh, they patched Jaimie up, but his head's scrambled. Bright kid in his day, too. Pretty much like you; only better looking, stronger, of course."

"Of course."

"It's the truth that wounds," Max Mallard chuckled. "Anyways, that's Jaimie Milius. Sleeps where he can, and people round here send him on messages because he won't take handouts. Nothing stuff, made-up work, go for coffee and such—that's what the painter was doing just now. Pours it down the sink, soon as Jaimie's back is turned. The painter grinds his own blend, Blue Mountain and some stuff from Africa." He smacked his lips nostalgically. "Good coffee."

Hal Gordon said, "You know everybody in the precinct."

Max Mallard didn't deny it. Instead he observed, "I like a

lot of 'em, too, that's the surprising part."

From the third floor of one of the brownstones, Norma Kesrick watched Jaimie Milius going for coffee. She also observed Max Mallard and a sandy-haired kid who looked so much of a derelict that he had to be a cop heading for a stakeout.

Norma, abstractedly scratching her breast with a crimson thumbnail, smiled nastily. She knew Max Mallard by sight and reputation. It pleased her to see without being seen, one jump ahead of him. Clever cops...

Arnie Kesrick's coughing claimed her attention. The walls in this apartment were thick, but the sound penetrated all the way from their bedroom at the back. Probably because her nerves were raw, her hearing neurotically sharp.

Snarling silently, Norma decided that it was Arnie's going-to-the-track cough. He had a library of them, branded into her understanding. Yes, definitely an *I-have-a-right-to-my-hobbies* cough. At least it wasn't the *frigid-useless-extravagant-bitch* hacking.

Norma cursed frustratedly, a vicious puff of breath momentarily fogging the window as Max Mallard passed out of sight.

Cocaine was expensive and so was Helen, who expected regular gifts and lunches and treats. But anyone saddled with Arnie was entitled to distractions.

"Belmont," Arnie Kesrick announced behind her, defiantly. And he coughed again.

Breath fog vanished, she studied his reflection an inch from her nose. Gaudy jacket, skeletal wrists almost obscene by contrast. Pants half an inch too high, through wearing suspenders. Strange the way some old men's clothes persisted in being baggy, though tailored.

"Hurry back," Norma told him, insincerity transparent, by intention.

"I might just do that, and you'd better be alone."

"I'll be counting the minutes, lover." Norma brushed past him to take a shower. The slammed front door was his farewell.

Standing passive beneath liquid needles, rapiers, Norma marvelled at the speed of Arnie Kesrick's transformation. She didn't like men in any sense, but was ready to tolerate them if the price was right. When she started working at Arnie's restaurant—well within living memory, two years ago, for pity's sake—he had seemed mature, urbane, almost European.

Squinting, Norma watched silver runnels of water cascad-

ing over her body. She'd been a fool, and that wasn't like her. Arnie Kesrick was selling an image as much as food. As if marrying her had proved some point, completed a chapter, he sold the business within months of the honeymoon, to retire.

And had become tiresomely old and different, virtually overnight. Old, and around so very much. Old, stingy, and awkwardly inquisitive. Like living with your grandfather. Norma had no family and, after eighteen months of Arnie Kesrick, was positive that she hadn't missed out on much.

She ought to be doing fine. The restaurant sale's profits were invested, and Arnie owned this building. Subtract maintenance costs and the rents from four apartments still paid for this one, and to spare. Norma suspected that he owned other buildings, too.

But even with what she managed to steal, or cheat out of him, money was tight. Her lifestyle simply didn't match the potential. . . It wasn't fair. She'd faked it all with Arnie from start to finish, but she had to look after herself, she had a right. For Arnie to implicitly offer one deal and then hit her with another was outrageous.

Towelling herself to a glow, Norma thought, for the thou-



sandth time, that everything would be beautiful if only Arnie would die.

She'd kill him without compunction; she felt certain that she had the nerve and dedication. But the wife was always prime suspect.

From habit, Norma drifted back to the living room window. Hours before Helen's cab would pull up—Helen didn't even bother to get out, if the signal potted plant wasn't on the sill—but the view, the sensation of being spectator at a vast, mystic game in which not even the players were aware of their involvement, made the vantage point Norma's favorite spot.

Coffee delivered, Jaimie Milius was strolling back to his warm doorway in the alley. Norma felt a spark of resentment. That dummy! Looking so happy, out of it, always with the hands in the pockets.

Suddenly her eyes narrowed and she forgot to breathe.

Supposing she did kill Arnie—and provided the cops with an even hotter suspect?

“So,” said Hal Gordon, “we’re a team.” He smiled brightly, aware of the abrasive power of cheeriness.

Max Mallard spoke heavily.

“You just go the same places I do, kid. Team! Captain says I got to have a partner, is all. For my money, it sucks. Shut up, read the street.”

They were sitting in a pickup truck, waiting for an event to go down. Hal Gordon doubted whether it would. Drugs were involved, meaning too many rival agencies, strange faces. Half a year with Max Mallard had taught him that the success and security ratio was in inverse proportion to the number of people aware of the action.

Scratching around for a topic to pass the time and hint at his perseverance — sheepishly amused at wanting to emulate a boor whom he happened to respect—Hal said, “Jaimie Milius has a girlfriend. Jaimie and a certain married lady are what you’d call an item.”

Max Mallard’s head turned, slow and ominous, a battleship turret with the dead cigar for a gun. “You’ve got a bad mouth, kid. Cheap shots I don’t like. Cheap shots at a vet like Jaimie are gonna get you off that so-called team, faster than fast. Capeesh?”

Face hot, Hal Gordon spluttered. “It’s true, dammit! You’re always telling me to watch and wait and store it away. I go home past Jaimie’s alley, matter of fact I stop to pass the time

of day. Make him match quarters for a buck, I always lose."

"Philanthropist," Max Mallard commented flatly.

"From doing that, I found a bar on the corner there. Pat's. It's like a routine, couple of afternoons a week. Match quarters if Jaimie's around, get a few brews at Pat's. Which is opposite that brownstone by the art gallery. So, two, three times now, the husband goes out and Jaimie goes in. Like those Swiss weather houses, you know? Little man comes out if it's going to rain, lady's there when it's fine."

Max Mallard brooded. Hal, wishing he'd never spoken, muttered, "Hey, it's no crime. The husband's a ruin, a real old party, and Jaimie's a virile kid. What the eye doesn't see, the heart never grieves about, right?"

"You talk a lot, kid. Swiss weather house. . . There's a lot of apartments in those places. Who are we talking about?"

"Uh . . . hell, I don't know! The guy's old, bald, and scrawny, goes in for those plaid jackets and real wide pants. I get the impression he plays the horses. The woman's a fox." Hal Gordon paused, frowning. "To look at," he added dubiously. "Tight unit, you know? Walks like a dancer. I saw her on the street

last week, maybe looking for Jaimie."

Max Mallard said: "I don't know the lady."

"But you will," Hal predicted, puzzled. "What's the big deal?"

"You never can know too much, kid. A thought to live by. Try to take it aboard some time."

**S**ubduing impatience, Norma said sweetly, "Surely you'll have a drink, Jaimie?"

Jaimie Milius started to nod, visibly changed his mind, and blushed. "No, I'm fine, lady."

"Jaimie . . . come on, it's Norma." She wished he'd do something other than sit on the edge of the couch. It had been a relief, early on, to discover that he wasn't a toucher, far less a stud. Norma was willing to fake for him, but platonic friendship was more restful. All the same, his docility was vaguely worrying.

Would anyone, even cops eager to close out a case, buy Jaimie Milius as a killer? Catching herself staring at him in cold appraisal, Norma glanced away. Sure they'd buy it. The man wasn't right in the head and didn't know his own strength.

Arnie Kesrick's death would strike the police as a repetition

of a story so familiar that it was a cliché. Old husband, young wife, lover. Husband returns unexpectedly, lover lashes out in panic.

No, Norma corrected herself, chatting without hearing the words. Not lash out. She had to be sure that Arnie was dead. Strangle him, that was the way. She already had the gloves, bulky wool gloves, and a clumsy leather pair designed for gardening, as an outer layer to leave the marks of larger hands than her own.

Arnie always took a nap when he got back from the track. She could do it before he properly woke up. Her hands flexed involuntarily, and she gasped. Arnie meant to go to the track tomorrow . . .

Thinking aloud, she said, "You're very clean, Jaimie. I've seen you on the coldest days, washing under that outside faucet, back of the bakery."

Jaimie Milius blushed again and hung his head. "I . . . I've seen ladies and little babies washing up by the base, winter mornings when they had to break the ice on the river first."

Tailing away, he felt miserable, uncertain whether he was telling lies. No mental picture came with the anecdote, yet it had popped into his head. Maybe it was something Dad told him

about Korea. Jaimie's pictures were of heat and red dust, he'd never seen ice. Had he?

Norma spoke briskly. "Jaimie, you'll be around, close by, tomorrow?" She smiled as his head came up. "I might need you."

"I'll do anything for you. You're kind to me." Lips moving silently, he worked something out. "Most folks are kind to me. But you being kind is nicer."

"Sure. Jaimie, time to go. Before my husband comes back. He's not kind. He's nasty. Cruel to me. Don't you ever speak to him, go near him. He gets angry. He doesn't like you. He . . . wants you sent away."

Jaimie blinked rapidly. "He's got no reason. To be like that."

Norma reflected that Arnie's murder would be of general benefit. Jaimie Milius would be detained, looked after properly, he didn't belong on the street, an object of charity. And she could start to live right, she'd earned it. Everybody won. Even Arnie, in a way. From his nagging and whining and scrimping, he didn't enjoy life.

The theory diverted her so much that she burst out laughing.

Jaimie Milius, nonplussed, hunched his shoulders and drove his fists deeper into his pockets,

before getting the idea and managing a guffaw.

**I**n fact Norma Kesrick had to wait forty-eight hours because her husband postponed his outing.

Then, at twilight, she opened the living room window and whistled shrilly. Jaimie Milius came to the mouth of the alley, stared around dazedly, was transfixed by another whistle. Beaming, waving, he hurried across the street.

Norma passed him in the lobby. "Go on up," she snapped, shaking his arm for emphasis. It was like pushing at wet concrete in a sack. "Go on up, the door's open, and wait for me. You wait up there, now!"

The two pairs of gloves were pinned against her side, under the loose coat, as she swept out. A truck, towering, roaring, pulsating, waited for the light to change at the next intersection. Norma tossed the gloves up, to land among rubble and the shattered lumber from some home.

Nobody noticed. If they had, it wouldn't have meant anything. People, in her experience, were always throwing things away.

Adjusting her expression, starting to run, she began looking for a cop.

**"N**ice of you," Lieutenant Nilssen said dryly, "to kind of attach yourself to Homicide, give us your matchless experience and like that, Maxie."

"I know Jaimie Milius. The only time he killed anything, he was wearing a uniform, it was the other side of the world, and Nixon was president." The dead cigar bobbed as Max Mallard spoke his piece.

The room was crowded: Lieutenant Nilssen and another Homicide man, the uniform off the beat whom Norma had first approached, now spinning out his attendance until quitting time. Technicians waiting for the M.E. to finish so that they could get at Arnie Kesrick and the bedroom. A female officer from the precinct; Norma; Jaimie Milius; and hovering by the door, Hal Gordon.

Norma turned to Nilssen. "He's calling me a liar! What the hell does he know, he wasn't even here when it happened!"

"Neither was I," the lieutenant pointed out. Though his tone showed more loyalty than commitment. "Maxie, step outside."

Out on the landing, holding the door shut behind him, Nilssen's anger surfaced. "What's with you, Mallard? You know

better than to come barrelling in like this."

Max Mallard cocked an eyebrow. "Ain't you heard of mid-life crisis, Pete? Come on, I know this kid. And the victim. And the wife. Don't we get interested in the wife when the husband gets snuffed, any more? Five minutes, Pete. Is it so much to ask? Just tell me the story." Replacing the cigar, he added, without fervor, "Please."

"Victim's Arnold Woodrow Kesrick, aged seventy. Wife is Norma Geraldine Baker Kesrick, aged twenty-eight. There you have it. She's a looker, and looking." Lieutenant Nilssen smirked, men-together cynicism overcoming his pique. "She's upfront about hitting the hay with young Milius, every chance she got.

"This afternoon, her old man came back suddenly, blew his top. He and Milius went in the bedroom; next thing Mrs. K. knew, Milius waltzes out and says he's killed the guy. She never even heard a struggle."

Nilssen gave Hal Gordon a sharp glance. "Something on your mind?"

Hal Gordon took a deep breath. He looked at Max Mallard, who gave no help. "Nothing," Hal responded lamely.

"You're learning," Max Mallard approved cryptically.

Lieutenant Nilssen said, "Nobody's ever going to accuse Milius of being swift. I don't know . . . I guess he's kind of retarded, slow. He says he never touched Kesrick, never spoke to the man in his life. He says Norma Kesrick is a friend, full point. No funny stuff. On both counts, he *would* say that.

"Okay, Maxie, chances are Mrs. K. put Milius up to it. But that's one sharp lady, her lawyer's on his way. We'll never prove it."

"Pessimism," Max Mallard wheezed. "Let's go back in there."

Nilssen opened the door. Max Mallard went straight to Jaimie Milius. "Stand up, son. Hands out of your pockets. Go on, kid, just do it. Nobody's angry with you."

Con conversationally, over his shoulder, the fat man addressed Hal Gordon. "When you and Jaimie match quarters, I bet he drops them pretty often."

Hal gaped at him. "Yes, but I thought he was just . . ." Going red, he mumbled, ". . . uh, clumsy."

"Yeah. Jaimie, make a fist for me. Tell you what, make two fists for me. Left and right. Real good, tight fists."

Jaimie Milius moved. The uniform exclaimed and fumbled at his holster, Lieutenant

Nilssen's right hand made a rapid slide under his lapel.

But Jaimie Milius had a forearm across his eyes and the free hand was burrowing back into his pocket, as he wept rustily.

"They did the best they could in the VA hospital," said Max Mallard. "Thirty percent mobility in both hands, on good days. Make a fist? Jaimie can't close his hands properly, and he needs both to stop a mug from slopping. Strangle a man? Jaimie has to get people to pop his beer cans for him."

"He did it," Norma shrieked. "He *did*. I saw him!"

"Sure you did," said Max Mallard. He kicked Hal Gordon's ankle. "We're all finished up here. Pete, you've got the message. Put Jaimie through all the medical tests in the book, you'll find he was physically incapable of killing her husband. Leaves you kind of short on suspects, but you'll think of something."

**"L**ook," Max Mallard grated, "I can't walk on water and that's dandruff in my hat, not glitter from parking the halo. Jaimie Milius would never have gone down for the Kesrick

killing; even a public defender would have caught on to his disability in time. I saved the poor guy a few hours of hard time is all."

It was a month later. Max Mallard and Hal Gordon, in green coveralls, were taking four times longer than needful to jockey a grand piano off a truck. While they watched a numbers drop.

They'd seen Jaimie Milius on the way to the place. Looking wan and lost, hands still in his pockets.

Max Mallard patted the piano lid, eased an imaginary kink from his back. "Light me, kid." Under his breath, he mused, "I feel sorry for the victim."

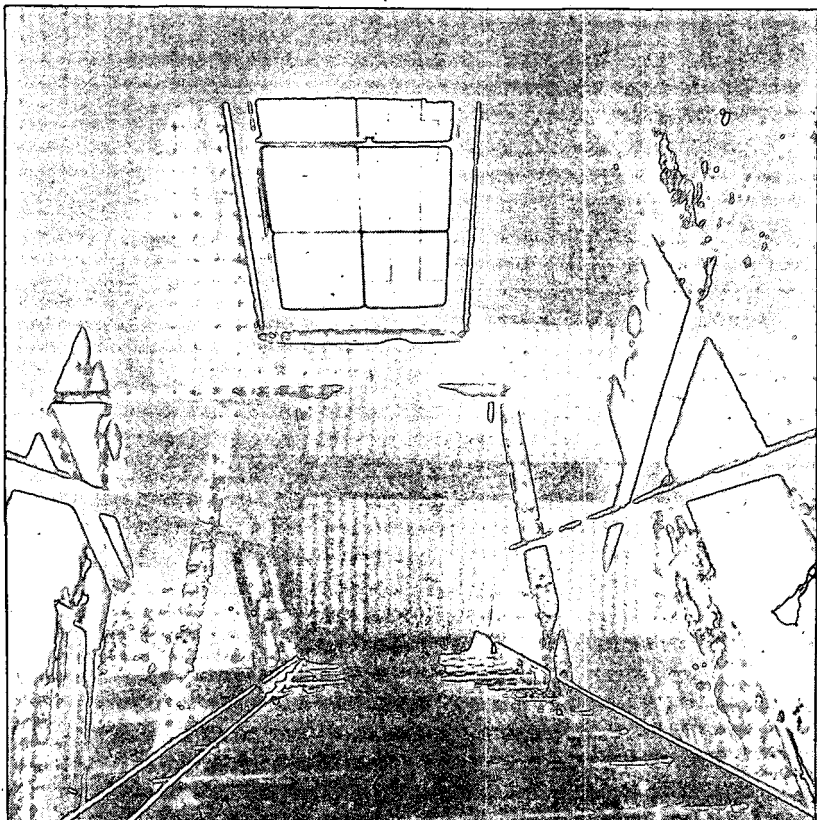
"Old Kesrick? You hardly knew him."

"Wake up, the dead can't be harmed. I mean Jaimie. She couldn't frame him, but she took the first good feeling he'd had in years, and made it poison, dirt. He'll never trust anyone again, long as he lives. That poor guy."

Hal Gordon cleared his throat, unheeded match searing his fingers and making him yelp. "Hey, you *are* Mr. Nice Guy!"

"Shut up and read the street," said Max Mallard.

# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



Arthur Tress

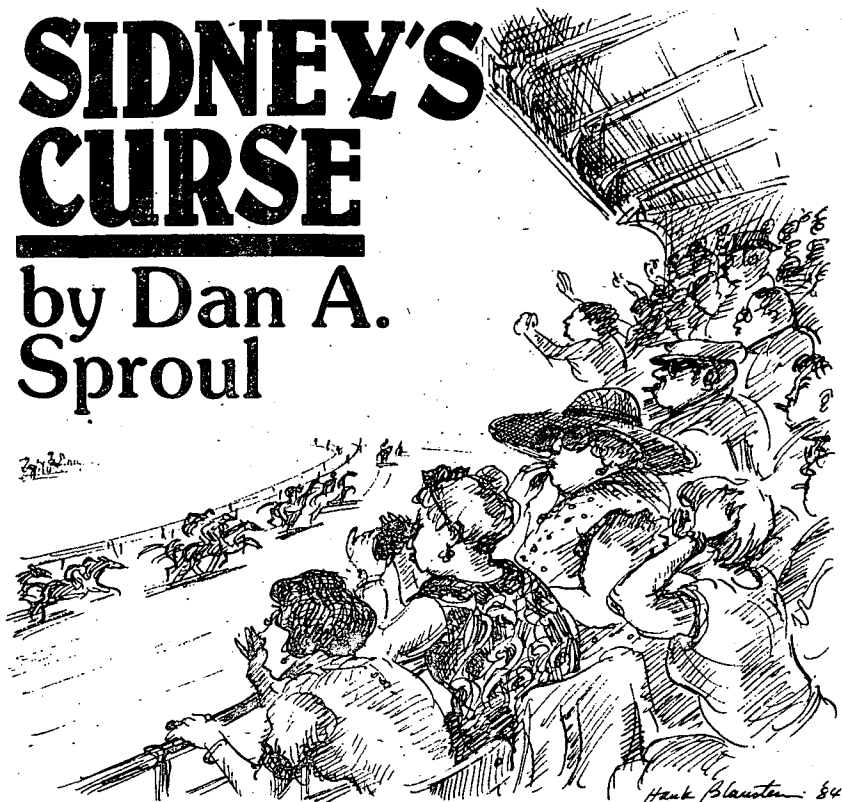
You don't *really* want to go up these stairs, do you? . . . We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the June Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.



# SIDNEY'S CURSE

by Dan A. Sproul



**S**idney, before his untimely demise some twelve years past, had been a pari-mutuel clerk on the Hialeah/Gulfstream/old Tropical Park racetrack circuit. The work suited him, since he was also an avid horseplayer during his brief sojourn on this earth. Sidney possessed the dubious, somewhat inexplicable talent of being able to lose with incredible consistency, against all

Illustration by Hank Blaustein

odds. It made him a near legend in racing circles, a household word to the throngs congregating wherever turf wagers were accepted.

Because of his fantastic ill fortune, Sidney was virtually immortalized; the name "Sidney" and the word "losing" became synonymous from the backstretch barns to the breeding aristocracy. Commonly heard trackside were such

expressions as: "... goat I bet in the fourth ran like Sidney had a C note on him." Big losers didn't simply lose, they "Sidneyed out," or were said to have "pulled a Sidney." Handicappers, bookmakers, touts, and trainers, everybody in the backstretch barns—they didn't call it bad luck. It was "Sidney's curse."

These facts were sadly but forcefully brought home to Sidney's widow, Tooty, when Sidney's nonexistent estate was transferred to her. Indeed, she was obliged to work as a waitress and a part-time real estate salesperson to take care of the accumulated debts.

Tooty formed the Wednesday Afternoon Widows' Pinochle Club several years after Sidney paid off his final wager to the Big Bookmaker in the sky. This particular Wednesday marked the tenth anniversary of the club. It also marked the club's tenth track day.

Since track day occurred only once a year, it was the high point of the club's activities. On track day, the members usually arrived about noon, earlier than normal, in order to take care of the necessary preliminaries. But, of course, they never knew which race was going to be the one, not until after the drawing. If one of the later races was drawn, they generally had time for a hand or two of pinochle

before leaving for the track.

The gathering on track day was always held at Tooty's house in Davie. Since Mildred lived next door, Tooty counted on her to arrive ahead of the others to help set up.

It was Norma, however, who was first to arrive on this track day. Tooty set the small platter of crustless sandwiches down on the card table to watch in silent agony through the picture window as Norma pulled her sub-compact painstakingly off the street, completely onto the lawn.

A strip of ground along the curb, running a foot and a half wide and ten feet long, had become a brown patch of barren wasteland, devoid of grass or any living thing. Tooty decided that thanks to the oil relentlessly oozing from the crankcase and rear end of Norma's nasty little car, she could forget about life flourishing on the contaminated spot for the next several decades.

Tooty's neighbor, Carolyn, who lived on the other side of her and who was not a member of the club, sat at Tooty's kitchen table behind a freshly poured cup of coffee. She was in her sixth month of pregnancy with her third child after only four short years of marriage.

The sound of the car on Tooty's lawn caused Carolyn to push herself out of the kitchen chair,

handling the cumbersome situation of impending motherhood without complaint, with a resolution rarely found in one so young. She stood looking longingly at the coffee, with full knowledge that if she succumbed to this third cup, diarrhea would quickly follow.

Tooty entered the kitchen. She thrust a fat manila envelope into her hands.

"Here's the money, Carolyn. You'd better go out the back way; I'd rather Norma didn't see you. If this doesn't work, I'm not sure I'll be able to explain it to them. Do you know what to do?"

"Yes, I think so." Carolyn's wide, innocent eyes were fixed on the thick pad of bills bulging out of the envelope. She nervously tucked the flap inside to cover the money.

"All right then," Tooty said, shooing her out the back door. "I'll call you right after the drawing—you'd better hurry."

As she watched Carolyn make her way carefully down the back steps, Tooty absentmindedly adjusted the angora sweater she wore to a position a little lower on her still trim hips and hurried back into the living room.

Norma, as was her custom, slugged the front door once with the heel of her hand, pushed it open, and forged on into the house.

"Tooooty—" she yelled, slamming the door. She looked up to see her hostess not more than four feet away.

"Oh . . . there you are."

"Norma, do you have to park that car on the lawn? It's killing all the grass. I mentioned it before."

Norma reopened the front door, gave Tooty a constrained smile. "I forgot. Hang on—only take a second to move it."

"Never mind now." Tooty concealed her irritation unsuccessfully. "The others should be here soon. How come you're so early?"

"I wanted to talk to you about the track fund."

"Can it wait a minute? I have to put some fresh coffee on."

"Sure."

When Tooty left, Norma turned to examine her obese figure in the full-length mirror on the closet door.

She wore a white knit dress. It promoted her plumpness. But she felt it gave her a clean, crisp look with her deep Florida tan. A look not to be achieved without the dress. Clamped on her head was a stupendous, wide-brimmed straw hat, on her nose a pair of gigantic sunglasses, round dark ones. Together they covered most of her plump face. The straw hat, white dress, and sunglasses gave the impression of a large albino owl, freshly blinded in a fist fight, standing

on its head in the nest to contemplate the tragedy of its plight.

She carried a handbag too large to fit into a twenty-five-cent Greyhound locker. It clunked down with the authority of a plumber's satchel when she dropped it on the spindly card table. The platter of sandwiches bounced three inches into the air.

Tooty came back carrying a handful of paper napkins. "So what about the track fund?" she asked, brushing her long dark hair with her free hand so that it fell behind her shoulders.

"It's ridiculous. We all put a dollar a week into the damned fund, then throw it away at the end of the year. Why don't we just divide the money up—it could be like a Christmas Club."

"Christmas is already over," Tooty pointed out. She lifted Norma's bag off the table and let it plummet to the floor with a thud.

"You know what I mean."

"Norma, I hear this argument every track day. You know the rule—we've all agreed to it. Besides, a dollar a week is no more than you spend a day on cigarettes."

Tooty's mention of cigarettes caused Norma to stoop down to her bag and start rummaging around for one. "It's not that it's all that much money. It's just such a waste—we've never won

anything. I don't think we ever will."

Orthopedic shoes clumping on the porch steps signaled the approach of Mildred from next door.

Norma stared at Tooty stonily, obviously expecting some kind of reply.

"We could win this time," Tooty finally answered, opening the door for Mildred.

Norma was unappeased. Besides, she was the type who derived no satisfaction from getting in the next to last word. She turned to the unwary Mildred, who plodded staunchly into the living room, favoring an arthritic hip broken in a fall two winters back while groveling about in the victory garden she steadfastly still maintained with patriotic fervor.

"Mildred, don't you agree we're throwing the track fund down the toilet—don't you think it would be better to split it up among the four of us?"

It was Mildred's custom to turn off her hearing aid while at home alone. A measure taken to save on batteries.

"What say?"

Norma immediately understood the problem. But when she reached out toward the pocket of the old lady's floral print dress to remedy the situation, Mildred slapped her hand.

"I can do it myself."

Norma's voice was a controlled shout.

"The track fund—a waste of money, don't you think so?"

"Don't have to scream. I can hear you."

"Well, what about it?" Norma pressed.

The old woman finished adjusting her hearing aid.

"What about what?"

A screech of tires in the street caused the three of them to glance out the front window just in time to see Imogene's single-owner, immaculate 1953 Chevrolet skid to a bouncy stall.

"Here's Imogene," Tooty announced, looking at her watch. "You two have a chair. We have to get right to the drawing, it's getting late." She opened the front door for Imogene.

"We haven't really settled this yet," Norma said, but when she caught sight of Imogene coming through the door, she slid her immense sunglasses down to the end of her nose to squint over the top at the cat Imogene clutched under one arm.

"What the hell are you doing with that cat?" she asked.

"Clarissa is about to have kittens," Imogene explained. "I just couldn't leave her on the boat alone."

The pregnant cat leapt from her arms and swiftly disappeared under the living room couch.

Imogene shouted, "That's all right—she'll be okay under there." It was to no purpose. No one had made the slightest attempt to hamper the cat on her journey.

"I don't want her to have her kittens under my couch," Tooty told her, bending down to peer at Clarissa.

The cat huddled against the wall, casting a malevolent stare at Tooty in return. Tooty extended her arm under the couch, stretching it as far as it would go. Clarissa watched in smug satisfaction as Tooty's fingers scratched into the carpet four inches short of her puffy little body.

Imogene brushed the cat hairs off her crepe dress. "Don't worry about her, Tooty. She'll come out when I call her."

"I don't trust cats," Mildred disclosed, shoving the hearing aid button more snugly into her ear.

"Oh, they're wonderful company," Imogene told her. "I have four on the houseboat now."

Mildred remained unconvinced. In her estimation, cats were not even fit company for other cats.

Each took her place at the table except Norma, who stood behind the only vacant chair. "Just a minute. Before we get started with all this rigmarole, I want everybody to know I'm against our throwing the fund

away again this year." She plunked down in the remaining chair opposite Imogene. "Imogene, I've been trying to tell Tooty that I don't think we should use the track fund. I suggested we split it up among us. Would you agree to that?"

Imogene's slight, bony-frame squirmed in indecision. She knew how strongly Tooty felt on this subject, but she really believed deep down it was a waste of money. She had resolved last year that the club was more important to her than the paltry dollar a week that went into the fund. Still . . .

"Well, I'm not sure—we've never won. It does seem like a terrible waste of good money. Couldn't we spread the money out over four or five races instead of betting it all on one? I mean . . . it seems like we'd have a better chance to win that way."

"That's just it," Tooty broke in. "None of us really knows anything about horseracing. That's why we worked out this system. Sure, it's a gamble—it's a gamble however many races we play. At least this way we aren't arguing over which horse to bet on. Besides, by only making one big bet we stand to win much more. And I've got a feeling we're going to do better this year. Just think, if we won the bet, the winnings could pay us as much as five hundred dollars

each—maybe even more. Isn't it worth the dollar a week to be able to look forward to the outing once a year? We always have a good time making the bet, don't we—win or lose?"

"Well, yes—I enjoy it," Imogene said. "But wouldn't it be even more fun if we could spend the money on more than one race? I know none of us knows anything about selecting a horse to bet, but why couldn't we buy one of those trout sheets?"

"That's *tout* sheet, Imogene," Norma informed her.

"I rest my case," said Tooty.

Norma, however, was not ready to relent.

"Mildred, don't you . . ."

"Whatever Tooty says," Mildred interrupted.

"Oh, the hell with it." Norma felt that Mildred was becoming senile or was just plain cantankerous. In any case, she wasn't going to change her mind. When Mildred got a notion in her head, she stuck to it like a barnacle to a boat bottom. Imogene, on the other hand, couldn't make up her mind. She wasn't senile. She was just a scatter-brain.

"Go ahead, Imogene," Tooty instructed. "Read the winners for the drawing. It's getting late."

Imogene nailed her bifocals to the bridge of her nose with a forefinger. She began to read from the sheet held at arm's

length in front of her.

"Tooty and Norma totaled fifty-nine games won. Norma and Mildred have forty-nine, Tooty and Mildred, thirty-eight . . ."

"You don't have to read them all," Mildred interrupted. "Tooty and Norma always have the most games—they get to draw."

Tooty handed the deck of cards to Imogene. "Fix the cards, will you, Imogene?" She looked at Norma, who was still pouting. "Which do you want to draw for, Norma?"

"The horse."

Imogene separated out the ace through ten of each suit, putting them into a pile. She shuffled the pile thoroughly; then set the small deck in front of Tooty.

Tooty cut the deck almost dead center, exposing the three of diamonds.

"The third race," Mildred and Imogene announced in unison.

Imogene added the jack and queen of each suit to the deck Tooty had cut. She reshuffled. The adjusted deck was placed in the center of the table. This time Norma cut. She turned up the jack of clubs.

"Number eleven horse," Norma informed them, without much enthusiasm.

"Don't forget to cut another one," Tooty reminded her. "In case the eleven horse doesn't run. You know what happened

a few years back—when we had to bet the same number horse as the number of the race after we found out the number we drew wasn't going to be in the race."

"I think the horse we ended up with would have been all right if it hadn't fell down going around the corner," Mildred said. "Do you remember that, Tooty—when our horse fell down?"

"I think that was the year before, Mildred," Tooty told her.

"No, it wasn't—I remember," Mildred insisted. "It was number seven—don't you recall? They drove that little wagon out there to load him on it . . . number seven."

"You're wrong, Mildred," Imogene piped up. "The day we bet the same number horse as the race was three years ago. He was number six—not seven. I remember because it was raining to beat the band that day, and we couldn't see what number it was that won when that pack of horses went past. Then, after a few seconds, it let up and we saw the number six come splashing by, all by himself."

"Oh yes, number six. That's right," Mildred said. "It was me that seen him first. That was the year I drove . . . Don't know how I forgot that."

While they were discussing it, Norma cut another card, the six of spades.



"Number six again," Mildred moaned, disappointedly. "I don't think we ought to use that number again after what happened the last time."

"It's just the standby number, Mildred," Tooty pointed out. "We probably won't have to use it."

"Whose turn is it to drive?" Imogene wanted to know.

Tooty started for the kitchen to get the track fund and unplug the coffee pot. There wasn't time for coffee if they had to be in Hialeah for the third race. Anyway, she had to call Carolyn next door to give her the numbers. "It's Mildred's turn," she called over her shoulder as she left.

"If Mildred drives, I'm not going," Norma said.

"Me neither," added Imogene.

"I ain't going, either," Mildred told them.

The sad fact was, when Mildred drove, no matter how much time they allowed she managed to fritter it away. Mildred refused to drive on the expressways. To make matters worse, she absolutely would not go over twenty-five miles an hour.

When she had driven the group three years ago, irate citizens following her, and sorely wanting to be elsewhere, had blatted horns while shouting obscenities in futile protest.

Mildred was a rock. Not once did the speedometer quiver a micron past twenty-five.

Seized by hopeless desperation, drivers stacked behind Mildred seemed to shed all sanity. They grasped at any glimmer of escape, often tearing into oncoming traffic with reckless abandon. Through shopping center malls, gas station islands, even over sidewalks they sometimes went, smashing garbage cans, knocking down street signs, and scattering small children fiendishly.

Only once during the hapless journey did the speedometer needle wobble past twenty-five. Norma, thoroughly agitated in the back seat after unsuccessfully threatening Mildred with strangulation, removed her brassiere, vowing if Mildred didn't step on it, she would wave it out the window as they passed the Church of the Nazarene. The needle crept up to thirty-five.

"I'll drive," Tooty shouted from the kitchen. She completed her call to Carolyn, entering the room a moment later carrying the track fund. She stuck the wad of bills out in front of her.

"Two hundred and four dollars," she advised them. "Imogene, you still owe four dollars."

Imogene pulled four crumpled bills from her purse. She handed them to Tooty.

"That's everything, then,"

Tooty said, jamming the currency down in her purse. "Let's go."

They all loaded themselves into Tooty's two-year-old Ford LTD. Tooty noticed that Carolyn's Gremlin, usually parked in the driveway next door, was already gone. She was about to start backing out of the drive when a shriek erupted from the back seat.

"Clarissa—I forgot all about her!"

Imogene jumped out. She returned seconds later with the cat. She put Clarissa on the middle of the back seat, next to Mildred, then got in herself.

"All right, we can go now."

Mildred eyed the cat in apprehension. She salvaged a shopping bag from the floor of the car, jammed it between herself and the cat. Clarissa conducted herself admirably throughout the insulting performance.

Once on the Palmetto Expressway, Tooty tromped down on the big Ford's gas pedal, reaching Hialeah in record time. The trip down the expressway elicited a few groans from Mildred, who kept her eyes shut most of the way except for an occasional glance at Clarissa when she thought she heard the shopping bag rustle.

After oohing and ahing over the scenery at the track, as they were inclined to do each year,

they managed to find seats in the grandstand just before the end of the second race.

There had been some trouble at the admission gate over the cat. Tooty paid all four of their admissions with the odd eight dollars out of the track fund, as she did every year. Imogene was the last in line. When she got to the turnstile, the man controlling the gate wouldn't let her through with the cat. She quickly remedied the situation by going back to the car and returning through a different gate with Clarissa in the shopping bag.

Wheezing a bit from the unaccustomed exertion, Imogene crumpled into the seat Mildred had kept vacant for her.

"Sorry it took me so long to get here. I thought I saw your neighbor, Carolyn, outside the restroom, Tooty—I suppose that's foolish. What would she be doing here?" She set the shopping bag down carefully between her feet. "Clarissa seemed to be acting up in the bag. I stopped to get her a drink of water. I think she might be about ready."

"Why didn't you leave her in the car?" Mildred asked.

"Oh, let her alone, Mildred," Norma said, "and let someone else look at the program." She reached out and snatched the program from Mildred's hand.

"That's mine!" Mildred

shouted. "I paid forty cents for that."

"You'll get it back. I just want to see the name of our horse . . . you don't know how to read it anyway."

"I do so."

Norma ignored her, examining the program in silence for several seconds. "You're not going to believe this. Guess what the name of our horse is?"

"I give up," Imogene said.

"Adolf Hitler," Mildred guessed.

"It's Sir Walter."

"So what?" from Imogene.

Tooty gave her a puzzled stare.

"Isn't Walter your son's name, Imogene?"

"Walter . . . yes. He's doing very well, you know. He owns the marina where I have my houseboat."

"You already told us that before," Mildred pointed out.

Clarissa squirmed in the bag.

"Can I see that?" Tooty asked, picking the program off Norma's lap.

Norma sat looking into the infield for a moment or two. She spoke with overtones of incredulity.

"Sir Walter . . . that's the number eleven horse. We do have the number eleven, don't we?"

"That's the number you drew," Tooty reminded her.

"Well, look at the big board out there." Norma pointed to

the infield tote board. "See where it says eleven?" Everybody looked to see where it said eleven. "Isn't that number below the eleven the odds on Sir Walter—the amount they pay back for each dollar you bet if you win?"

"That's right," Tooty confirmed, squinting at the tote board.

"Well," Norma continued, "according to that, he's fifty to one. That means he doesn't have a chance."

"Wait a minute," Tooty broke in. "They all have a chance. He's got just as good a chance as the rest."

Imogene immediately jumped in.

"No, he doesn't, Tooty—Norma's right. We shouldn't throw our money away on him."

Tooty relented somewhat. "Well, the odds are pretty high. How about if we go to the second choice horse, the number six?" He's only fourteen to one."

Mildred immediately snapped to attention. "We ain't goin' to bet the number six any more. Tooty—you said we wouldn't use the number six any more. He's no good. Anybody who seen him the other time knows that."

"Mildred, it's not the same horse," Tooty explained. But Mildred, as Tooty realized, was no more flexible than a railroad tie once she had her mind set.

Her stubbornness was an impenetrable shield. It repulsed reason and logic like so many ping-pong balls caroming off the great pyramid of Giza. Tooty became certain Mildred had her mind made up when the old woman reached over to jerk the program out of her hand.

Tooty withdrew the track fund from her purse. "All right," she said, handing each of the others fifty dollars. She kept the remaining fifty for herself. "I'm not going to fight the majority."

Tooty decided she couldn't really expect them to continue to go along, losing year after year. She stood up, starting up the aisle to the sellers' windows.

"I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm going up and bet anyway." She left them to ponder her absence, returning in less than five minutes.

"You didn't go and bet that number six, did you, Tooty?" Mildred asked.

Tooty shook her head in a negative fashion. Each member of the Wednesday, Afternoon Widows' Pinochle Club waited expectantly for her to comment further.

"I didn't bet either one of the horses we drew."

Feeling as badly as they did about disrupting the track day ritual, none felt inclined to press Tooty as to her selection.

The horses for the third race

had been warming up on the track. Now they milled about the starting gate as each in its turn was prodded and pulled into the appropriate chute by the starters.

The lake in the middle of the infield rippled softly. Near the south shore, pink flamingos gathered on a tiny islet. They remained motionless, adding to the air of expectation.

"THEY'RE ALL IN THE GATE," blared over the speaker system, causing an even more profound hush to descend. Norma clutched her fifty dollar share of the track fund tightly, as did the others.

"THEY'RE OFF!"

A mass of digging, driving, straining thoroughbreds bolted from the gate, starting their mile journey around the oval.

Number six, bumped coming out of the gate, trailed the field by eight lengths rounding the clubhouse turn. Following him by three lengths, running dead last, was Sir Walter, who had stumbled to his knees at the start.

Entering the backstretch, number six closed on the pack. Sir Walter ran only a length behind him. As they proceeded down the backstretch, Sir Walter pulled abreast of number six. Together they slowly began to pass the pack on the outside.

At the three-eighths pole, before entering the final turn for

home, there remained only the leading number nine horse for the pair to overcome.

On the stretch turn, number six went to the inside next to the rail. Straightening up for the run to the wire, the number nine horse was in the middle of the track with a slight lead, braced by Sir Walter on the outside, number six on the rail. At the eighth pole, halfway down the stretch, the nine horse began to shorten stride; he fell behind rapidly.

Now the track announcer could be heard above the din. "IT'S SIR WALTER AND MISTER PRINCIPAL, MISTER PRINCIPAL AND SIR WALTER..."

The two horses matched strides exactly, heads extended, ears laid back, manes flying. Their hooves hit the loose sand, lifting again to drive even more powerfully to the finish. They ran together in perfect unison, thrusting and straining as one, as if they were a single animal. Neither would yield to the other as they thundered across the finish.

The track announcer could not call the winner. Nearly ten minutes passed as a photograph of the finish was examined. Suddenly the numbers six and eleven were posted one-two on the tote board. They flashed off and on. The announcement came.

"THE PLACING JUDGES HAVE DECLARED THE RACE A DEAD HEAT..."

A resounding roar slid across the grandstand, drowning out the announcer after the words "dead heat." The widows sat dumbfounded, trying not to look at each other. Not one of them was certain of what was taking place. They all suspected, however, that whatever it was had disastrous portent.

A scream of pure, rapturous glee exploded from a portly, mustached fan sitting behind Imogene. His right hand contained a rolled up copy of the *Daily Racing Form* which he swung violently, walloping nearby patrons indiscriminately. He accidentally whacked Mildred on the head with it, causing the hearing aid button in her ear to pop out onto the cement floor. It rolled into the aisle, where it was promptly stepped on by a passerby.

Imogene reached behind her to pull on the man's pants leg.

"What does that mean—dead heat?"

At first he ignored her, continuing his strange gyrations. She persisted.

"It means I won six hundred bucks!" the fan screamed at her. He gave a yowl, pitching his *Form*, program, and sundry other papers into the air.

"What's going on?" Mildred asked. The wire from her hear-

ing aid bent around the collar of her dress, thrusting into the air like a lightning rod.

Finally, the big winner sat back down in his seat, quivering, counting, fondling the stack of win tickets he held.

Imogene continued to insist.

His eyes focused on her, but he gave her only the eyes. Head, chest, body, and soul enfolded, cherished with single-minded delight, the winning tickets he clasped to his bosom. The miserable, depraved, injustice-choked world had been transformed into Elysian bliss in less than a minute and a half.

"It means that both horses won," he condescended to inform Imogene, finding it not painful in the least to expend a small amount of his euphoria in commonplace civility. "If you got a win ticket on either one of them, it's good. And look at the price on that eleven, ninety-eight sixty—I got six two-dollar win tickets on that beauty."

"Oh, I see," she said.

Imogene turned to say something to Tooty, thought better of it. She faced forward, looking out across the beautifully landscaped turf course. Her lips were a thin, tight line.

"It paid \$98.60 for two dollars," Norma mumbled. "That's almost ten thousand dollars we would have won." She said something further, but it was inaudible.

Mildred's eyes were fixed on the number six, which blinked on and off mockingly in the win position, prominently displayed on the infield totalizator board. "Does that mean the six won?" she whispered to Imogene, pointing a gnarled old finger at the tote.

Imogene nodded her head absently. The indignant ire Mildred had been about to spew at the clumsy lout behind Imogene slowly drained from her, stifled by a sense of irreplaceable loss. She could replace the hearing aid button.

Tooty stood up.

"We might as well go," she told them stoically.

They all rose to file silently down the steps. They had almost reached the entrance when Imogene turned to start back toward the grandstand.

"I forgot Clarissa," she said in quiet explanation as she scurried away.

Each stood mute as they awaited her return. She was back in a matter of minutes, empty-handed.

"Somebody stole her."

They trudged back to the car in silence. Nobody spoke on the drive back to Davie. When they arrived at the house, Tooty invited all of them inside. No one wanted to accept, each started to depart, going their separate ways without a word, faces downcast.

"Wait, please!" Tooty shouted. "Now I want you all to come inside and sit down. This is our tenth anniversary. There's something I want to tell you."

The members were dejected; each wished things could be as they were before. They knew without a doubt it wasn't possible after today. Even so, custom won out. They headed reluctantly for Tooty's front door.

Inside, Mildred sipped her coffee, holding the saucer carefully underneath. Norma fiddled with the cards, while Imogene fidgeted in her chair, hands folded prayer fashion on the table in front of her.

"I think most of you know about my husband, Sidney," Tooty began. "He was very unlucky at betting horses. Everyone who ever knew him said he had some kind of curse—Sidney's curse they called it. Sidney never talked about it to me. But when I went out to the track for Sidney's things, and his final paycheck, the people out there talked about nothing else. In fact, everybody I spoke to at the track—the friends at Sidney's funeral—they all said Sidney ranked as one of the world's great all-time losers. He was truly cursed in two ways. He couldn't stop betting, and he could never win.

"I didn't believe in the curse. I couldn't believe anybody could

have such sorry luck as they all said Sidney had. Out of curiosity, I made several two-dollar bets myself on favorites, to see what would happen. They lost. I bet twenty favorites over a period of five days—they all lost. I asked Sidney's friends at the track about it. They told me it was next to impossible. Favorites win thirty percent of the time on the average. I bet twenty more favorites. After forty losers in a row I decided the curse was not only possible . . . I had inherited it."

"If that's true," Norma said, "how come you didn't let someone else make the bet for us. I could have made the bets. Good God! No wonder we lost every year."

She picked up her oversized bag and stood up to leave. "I always suspected we never had a chance to win."

Tooty moved quickly between Norma and the door. "Wait a minute. In all these years I never bet any of the track fund money. I knew we'd lose it if I did."

Norma sat back down.

"But what about all those tickets you always brought back to the seat with you?" Imogene asked.

"Discarded tickets," Tooty explained. Mildred and Imogene still wore blank looks. "From previous races run—losers the rest of the crowd threw



away. The only money I ever bet on the club's selection each year was a two-dollar bet I made with my own money."

"Where the hell's our money, then?" Norma's voice conveyed more intensity than she felt comfortable with. "I mean . . . all those track funds, they must add up to close to two thousand dollars by now."

"Eighteen hundred," Tooty corrected her, "less four hundred fifty of my own money . . . um, that's thirteen hundred fifty dollars."

The back door slammed. Norma gave Carolyn a quick glance as she entered the living room, then ignored her. "Okay, where's the thirteen hundred fifty?"

"I gave it to Carolyn this morning to bet for us."

Norma stood up again. "You did what!"

"She bet the club's selection for us," Tooty clarified.

All eyes fastened on Carolyn. She looked at the older ladies nervously. Imogene recognized immediately the shopping bag Carolyn took from behind her back.

"Where'd you get that bag?" she asked.

"I went down to where you were sitting, but everybody had already gone. I found this

bag with a cat in it."

"Clarissa!" Imogene shouted.

"Where's Clarissa?"

"Clarissa?"

"The cat," Tooty translated.

"She's over at my house having some milk."

All eyes fastened on the bulging bag, which Carolyn promptly turned upside down on the card table. Bundles of money of all denominations cascaded onto the top, overflowing onto the floor.

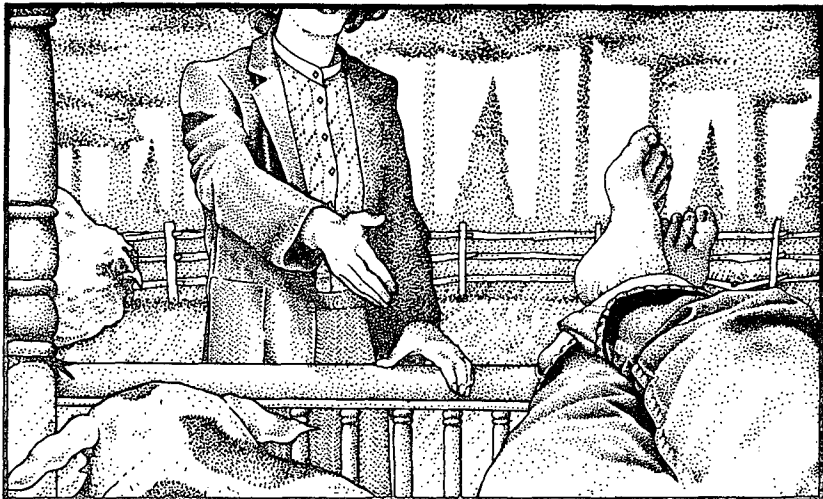
"I'm sorry, Tooty," Carolyn said. "I got a little confused when I talked to you on the phone about whether you wanted me to bet the number six or the number eleven, so I bet half on each one. I counted it. There's just under forty-two thousand dollars. Is that okay?"

Norma sucked in a breath upon seeing the money, then forgot to exhale. For once she sat speechless.

"But how . . ." she finally stammered, ". . . how could you know it would win—I mean, how could you be sure the eleven . . ."

"It was simple," Tooty smiled. "When I went up to the windows, I bet every horse in the race *except* the number six and the number eleven."

"What's going on?" Mildred asked.



# Touch Me Not

## by Thomasina Weber

**H**elen Frazer was standing on a dusty, forgotten road deep in the heart of the pine woods. She was wearing a serviceable tweed suit and sturdy walking shoes, an outfit, she was beginning to realize, not quite appropriate for Georgia in July. Her mannish hat was pulled sharply down over one eye, and she stood as if she were nailed to a telephone pole. In her hand was a small satchel.

Beyond the drunken fence squatted an equally drunken house. A man, sprawled on the floor of the porch, peered at her from under his hat brim.

"Good day," she called briskly. "Mr. Raymond Atkins?"

"Yup."

Helen looked inquiringly to either side. "They ain't no gate," he said. "You gotta climb."

"Why in heaven's name isn't there a gate?"

"Never go nowhere."

Helen tossed her satchel over and then tackled the fence. She got one leg across and stopped, her tweed skirt high above her shapely knees. It was a rather degrading idea, but it might work. After all, once he took her hand, she had him—mission accomplished.

"Mr. Atkins, I'm afraid I'm stuck. Would you mind helping me?"

"Help yourself," was the casual reply.

Obviously it wasn't going to be quite that simple. But she would not give up. She was determined to get to the bottom of the whole unhealthy situation. She remembered the odd smile on Mr. McGinnis' face when he handed her the file card bearing the name and address of Raymond Atkins. At the time, she had wondered idly at the dogeared condition of the card; now she was beginning to understand.

"Hike your other leg over and jump," said Raymond Atkins.

Her face flushed, Helen hopped off the fence, retrieved her satchel, and strode up to the porch, scattering shrieking chickens in all directions. She forced a smile and stuck out her hand.

"How do you do?" she said. "I am Helen Frazer."

"Howdy." He did not move. "Set yourself down."

She looked around. "But I don't see—"

Raymond Atkins stretched out a bare foot and jabbed a fat pig who had been snoring behind the one remaining porch pillar. "Theresa, move over and give the lady a seat," he said as the pig squealed its way down into the bald yard.

Helen, who thought she had already reached the boiling point, felt her temperature rise even higher. "Your pig answers to Theresa?" she asked.

"Named her for a lady I knowed once. Called me 'Waymie.'"

She decided not to pursue that. "Mr. Atkins, aren't you wondering why I'm here?"

"Nope. You got a right."

"May I ask your age?"

"About forty-five, I reckon."

"Forty-five! Well, actually, you look about that. You seem to be strong, and I imagine, if you possessed the courtesy to stand up in the presence of a lady, you would be rather tall."

"Umm-m." He remained seated.

"I would like to know, Mr. Atkins, just what has become of the Southern Gentleman?"

"Which one?"

Helen sighed and plopped down in the pig's vacated seat. She

took off her hat and fanned her face. An utterly impossible man! No wonder his file card was shabby and worn. None of the others had been able to make him take their hands; he was completely anti-social. Well, he would soon find out he had met his match. She would get him if she had to stay all night.

"No sense in sitting there like a bubblin' lobster," said Raymond. "Why don't you take your clothes off?"

"I beg your pardon!"

He passed his hand over the lower part of his face. "I mean, seein' as how you got your satchel and all."

"Oh." She opened it and peeped inside. "There does happen to be a lightweight dress in here. If you'll show me to your bath, I'll sponge my face."

"Pump's in the front yard, rest's in the back."

Helen turned the color of a stormy sunset. "I'll just change into my dress," she said, getting to her feet and yanking open the sagging screen door.

The interior of the shack was a housewife's nightmare—the rough wooden floor with gaps between the planking for rats to come and go; the curtainless, partly-paned window; the rumpled cot against the wall; the rickety wooden table and the agonizingly uncomfortable-looking chair beside it. She stared in disbelief at the primitive woodstove with its grimy stovepipe thrust through a gouged-out hole in the roof which had been cut too large and was stuffed with rags to keep out the rain. Eyeing this fire hazard, Helen wondered in amazement how Raymond Atkins had avoided delivering himself to the Heavenly Realm long before this. She changed into the thin, flowered dress, being careful not to touch anything, since everything appeared to be on the verge of disintegration.

As she stepped out on the porch, Raymond glanced at her approvingly. She ignored the interest in his eyes. "How can you exist in such an uncivilized manner?" she asked.

"Tain't uncivilized to me," he replied, rubbing his toes against Theresa, who had reclaimed her seat during Helen's absence.

"But, what do your friends think?"

"Ain't got no friends. Nobody knows I'm here."

"And just look at your hands," she continued. "Filthy! Now, look at mine." She stretched them down toward him. "Feel them. They're clean, soft—"

"Don't hold hands with women," he said, yawning.

All right, Mr. Atkins, she said to herself, go ahead and be dif-

ficult. Just like a man. I never saw one yet who thought of anyone but himself. And the only thing they're interested in is—Oh, no! I couldn't do that. Not for any man on earth would I pretend to be a simpering, cloying female. Actually, though, Raymond Atkins doesn't seem to be the type who would—Of course he is. They're all the same. Why, the minute he thought I was making up to him, he would fall all over himself in his typical, masculine, animalistic rush to get his hands on me. Yes, he *would* now, wouldn't he?

She let a smile steal over her face. "I'm sorry, Mr. Atkins. We seem to have got off on the wrong foot, so to speak." She told herself the result was the important thing. How she achieved it was immaterial. "May I sit next to you?"

He answered by removing his hat, revealing his face fully for the first time. A startled gasp escaped her lips, not entirely due to the effort of lowering herself gracefully to the floor beside him and Theresa.

"Why, you are a *very* handsome man," she said. And then, "Shall we be friends?" she murmured. She reached for his hand.

"Suits me," he said, raising both hands to clasp them behind his head.

"Don't tell me you're bashful, Mr. Atkins!"

He grinned at her, showing straight white teeth with no vacancies. "Nope. I'm just agin' Collection Agents."

Helen froze. "I'm afraid I don't know what you mean."

"Sure you do. Just like all them others did."

"Oh?" She felt her throat closing.

Raymond chuckled. "You ain't the first, you know. Ol' Fats McGinnis and me growed up together, coupla hundred years ago."

"Fats McGinnis?"

"Your Head of Collections," he said, pronouncing it carefully.

Helen wondered how much he knew. For some time rumors had been circulating that all was not right in the Celestial Collection Department. The Law said that any Collection Agent who failed just once to collect his assigned person was automatically disqualified for promotion, thereby forfeiting his chance at the eventual position of Head of the Collection Department, a position Mr. McGinnis had held for the unheard-of term of more than a hundred years.

"Never did like Ol' Fats much," Raymond went on. "He didn't like me, neither. Called me stubborn as a Yankee mule. Guess that's why he made the deal with me. Needed somebody with a mind of his own."

"What deal?"

"He come to see me about twenty years after he died. Seems he got promoted to this Head job, and he wanted to keep it. Said if I would make sure every agent he sent me failed, he would let me live as long as I had a mind to, and pick the age I wanted to stay, besides."

"Well! I would certainly have thought Heaven immune to such underworld tactics! Just wait until the Chief of Angels hears about this!"

"Who's gonna tell him?"

"Why, I am, of course."

"Goin' back alone?"

The vision of an eternity of collection work with all hope of advancement gone appeared before her with startling clarity. Helen's collection record had been most promising up till now, but it looked as though she was about to join the ranks of the other up-and-coming agents who had failed. Even if she were given another chance, in return for exposing Mr. McGinnis, her failure to collect Raymond Atkins would eat away at her self-confidence until she was fit to be only an elementary angel. Why, it would take hundreds of years, if ever, to work herself up to her present level again. The prospect appalled her.

She took a deep breath. "Mr. Atkins, you seem to be a reasonable man. I'm sure you would be the last one on earth to deny a person advancement in his—or her—chosen field." She waited for a reply, but none was forthcoming. "I have worked a long time to get where I am, and collecting you is absolutely vital to my career. If you will forgive my saying so, it's more important to me to collect you than it is to you to remain on the earthly plane. In fact," she added, in a burst of inspiration as she looked around, "I can't see why you aren't bored to death down here."

Raymond wriggled his toes against Theresa's plump side, and she grunted in contentment. "Seems to me Heaven would be even more boring, with all them do-gooders up there."

"Oh, it isn't like that at all!"

"No? You mean you kick up your heels once in a while?"

"No, that is not what I mean. We all have our jobs to do, and we take pleasure in our accomplishments. Virture is its own reward, as I'm sure you know."

Raymond slid down on his spine and tipped his hat forward over his nose. "If I was a snorer, I'd snore."

Helen jumped to her feet. "Really, Mr. Atkins, you are not only

obnoxious, but insulting! And how do you know you don't snore?"

"That, ma'am, is none of your business."

"I must say I have never met a more revolting person than you, Mr. Atkins, and I fail to see why they want you up there. You don't look like celestial material to me, and I'm sure you would add nothing whatever to our realm."

"That's okay by me," he mumbled from beneath his hat.

"In that case, I'll leave." She marched down the porch steps and toward the fence. By the time she reached it, she realized that she was letting her anger cloud her common sense. She turned and strode back to the porch where Raymond still sat, apparently asleep.

"I'll give you one more chance," she said, extending her hand. "Unpleasant though you may be, I can find it in my heart to forgive you."

He tipped his hat back and squinted up at her. "Thank you kindly, ma'am. I'll sleep better for that."

She let her hand drop to her side. How could she have had the effrontery to think that she could succeed where all the others had failed? It was probably because she had such a fierce determination to advance, whereas the others seemed to accept their failure casually. Perhaps that was one of the lessons she had to learn—to recognize her limitations. She turned and started to walk away.

"Miss Frazer?"

She looked over her shoulder. Raymond was sitting up now, resting his elbows on his knees. "Where ya goin'?"

"Back," she said.

"Too bad. Chalk up another one for Fats."

"Yes, but I did my best."

"Yeah, well, for a while there, I thought you were gonna be the one to beat him."

Helen had walked back to the porch again and was glaring down at him.

"Oh, you did, did you? If it weren't for you, I would be."

"Taint my fault. It's yours."

"How can you say such a thing?"

"It's your fault because you're giving up. That's just what they want you to do."

Helen sighed in exasperation. "Short of chasing you around the yard, Mr. Atkins, there is nothing else I can do."

Raymond grinned. "That don't sound like such a bad idea."

"I am not in the mood for levity."



"Maybe not, but you sure look pretty when you're riled. Now, you take Theresa, the first Theresa. She got all cutesy and then weepy and wanted to slobber up my good shirt. I kept my distance." Helen looked at his shirt and thought that a few tears might have done it some good.

"Why didn't you spring a leak like her?" he asked.

"I have certain principles, Mr. Atkins. I will go only so far to achieve my ends."

Raymond rubbed his chin with a grimy hand. "Seems to me a little while ago you got pretty cutesy yourself."

Helen blushed. "Which I now regret," she said. "I told myself that the end justifies the means, although I knew it would take quite some time to make myself believe that. Fortunately, it had no effect on you, so it will be easier to forget how I acted."

"I won't forget it," he said.

"It makes no difference to me whether you forget it or not. I'm the one who has to live with my conscience. I am prepared to return and admit my defeat. At least I will still be able to hold my head up, knowing I have not compromised my beliefs. There are more important things than one's career."

"Maybe you don't have to go back," Raymond said.

"I believe in facing my problems."

"If you stay here, you won't have a problem to face."

"Are you suggesting I go—AWOL?"

"Why not? They'll never miss you."

"In the first place, Mr. Atkins, our recordkeeping system is fool-proof. In the second place, why would I want to stay on earth?"

"I'm offering you a home, Miss Frazer."

"You're *what*? Are you suggesting that I take up residence in this—this—hovel?"

"Well, I guess it could use a little tidyin' up, but you'd have that done in no time."

"This can't be happening! I cannot be standing here listening to you proposing to me!"

"Hey, wait a minute. I didn't say nothing about marrying."

"That's even worse! Mr. Atkins, I truly believe you belong right here, forever and ever."

He got to his feet and stood looking down at her. As she had surmised, he was quite tall. "Tell you something, Miss Frazer," he said, "I really didn't expect you to stay here. I just wanted to see what you'd say. You reacted just like I thought you would."

"Do you mean to say you were *testing* me?" Helen took a step

backwards. "What right do you have to test me? Just who do you think you are? Goodbye, Mr. Atkins!"

She spun around and started for the fence, only to be stopped as he came up behind her and grabbed her around the waist with one hand and took her hand in the other.

Suddenly the clouds were swirling over and around them. Helen's surge of elation at his collection fought with her apprehension as she envisioned Heaven with its newest resident.

"Never thought I'd be follerin' a woman to the Gates o' Hell!" said Raymond, laughing.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, but that is not where we're headed." She tried to shake him loose. "Let me go," she said. "We're here now and this is the end. Go about your own business until you're sent for."

"That's just what I'm doing."

"What do you mean?"

"You think I wanted to see Ol' Fats McGinnis kicked out of his soft job? You think that's why I come?"

"Of course! Surely you have some sense of decency, some desire to restore Heaven to its once pure and idyllic state!"

"If I felt that way, I would have come when Theresa the first was mooning around trying to collect me, wouldn't I? But you're different. If ever I see'd a woman I could take to—heck, a coupla hundred years in that dump down there . . . well, truth to tell, Miss Frazer, I was bored outa my skull. But I figure any place you are can't be all bad."

Indignation pulled Helen's hand out of his. "Mr. Atkins!" He stepped closer. "What about Fats McGinnis?" she said. "What about exposing his insidious racket?" She was slowly backing up. "What about—"

"What about 'em?" Raymond made a lunge for her. She whirled and ran, glancing back to see him gaining on her, his laughter bouncing from cloud to cloud. She would expose the McGinnis racket with or without Raymond's help, but that scandal would be nothing compared to the scandal that looked imminent.

"This is a respectable place, Mr. Atkins," she cried, still running. "Peace and quiet reign supreme—"

"There ain't gonna be no peace and quiet until I catch you," he said.

Well, thought Helen, it looks as though the end is only the beginning. She slowed down just a little.

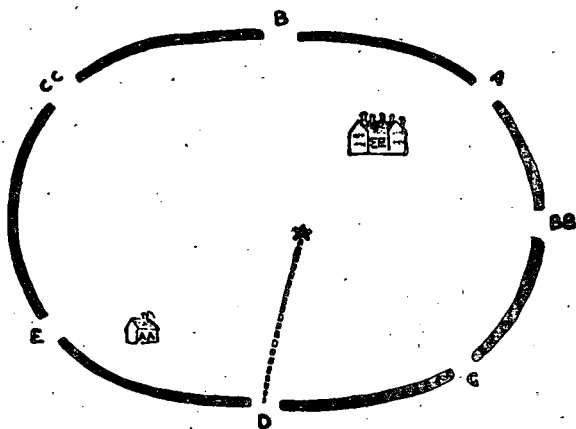
# UNSOLVED

by  
H. E. Dudeney

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the December issue.

The mystery of Ravensdene Park was a tragic affair, as it involved the assassination of Mr. Cyril Hastings at his country house a short distance from London.



On February 17th, at eleven P.M., there was a heavy fall of snow, and though it lasted only half an hour, the ground was covered to a depth of several inches. Mr. Hastings had been spending the evening at the house of a neighbor, and left at midnight to walk home, taking the short route that lay through Ravensdene Park—that is, from D to A in the sketch-plan. But in the early morning he was found dead, at the point indicated by the star in our diagram, stabbed to the heart. All the seven gates were promptly closed, and the footprints in the snow examined. These were fortunately very distinct, and the police obtained the following facts:

The footprints of Mr. Hastings were very clear, straight from D to the spot where he was found. There were the footprints of the Ravensdene butler—who retired to bed five minutes before mid-

night—from E to EE. There were the footprints of the gamekeeper from A to his lodge at AA. Other footprints showed that one individual had come in at gate B and left at gate BB, while another had entered by gate C and left at gate CC.

Only these five persons had entered the park since the fall of snow. Now, it was a very foggy night, and some of these pedestrians had consequently taken circuitous routes, but it was particularly noticed that no track ever crossed another track. Of this the police were absolutely certain, but they stupidly omitted to make a sketch of the various routes before the snow had melted and utterly effaced them.

The mystery was brought before the members of the Puzzle Club, who at once set themselves the task of solving it. Was it possible to discover who committed the crime? Was it the butler? Or the gamekeeper? Or the man who came in at B and went out at BB? Or the man who went in at C and left at CC? They provided themselves with diagrams—sketch-plans, like the one we have reproduced, which simplified the real form of Ravensdene Park without destroying the necessary conditions of the problem.

Our friends then proceeded to trace out the route of each person, in accordance with the positive statements of the police that we have given. It was soon evident that, as no path ever crossed another, some of the pedestrians must have lost their way considerably in the fog. But when the tracks were recorded in all possible ways, they had no difficulty in deciding on the assassin's route; and as the police luckily knew whose footprints this route represented, an arrest was made that led to the man's conviction.

Can our readers discover whether A, B, C, or E committed the deed? Just trace out the route of each of the four persons, and the key to the mystery will reveal itself.

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See page 132 for the solution to the October puzzle.

*"The Mystery of Ravensdene Park," taken from The Canterbury Puzzles by H. E. Dudeney, copyright © 1958 by Dover Publications, Inc., N.Y., N.Y.*

FICTION

# The Concrete Nothingness Of The Letter Mu

by Ann F. Woodward



*Illustration by Nick Jainshiggs*

At the beginning of the Fourth Month, when all the blossoming freshness of spring was at its height, the Lady Aoi decided to make a pilgrimage to Haseh Temple. She told the princess whom she served that it was because she had had an ominous dream, the subject of which she felt it would be bad luck to mention. The dream in fact had concerned the princess herself, but Aoi thought that such a dream had not been necessary to make her decide to leave the capital and make the long trip south. That the princess was in need of special prayer had been obvious to her for a long time.

According to everyone else, it was the prince's fault. His adventures with women were well known among those at court, and there were few who thought them excessive, for he had always been careful to visit his principal wife steadily. This time, however, he had so lost his balance over the young daughter of the General of the Guards that he would stay at her house for ten nights running.

The princess spent long hours waiting for him, her face serene and her fingers busy with sewing or writing, her self-control absolute. She was up early sewing robes; she copied sutras late into the night. At times, there

would be an outcry among the servants, calls that the men were heard along the street clearing the way for his carriage to pass, that he was coming. Then they would throw open the gates and kneel in readiness to receive him. And the whole clamorous group would race by without slowing, on their way to some other destination.

Then there were times when he would send a note, apologizing and explaining, promising to come that evening. The princess, with unbroken calm, would order preparations and frown on any open eagerness among her women. Sometimes even then he would not come. If he did, he could not be sure of warmth from the princess. Aoi knew that the princess dared not relax that tight control and let her feelings show because she feared above all things the vulgarity of angry words and freely running emotion, whether of gladness or of scorn. The princess suffered headaches and had once fainted. She could not eat. For Aoi, the sight of the damage she was doing to herself, as her fingers held the needle or the brush with ever whiter knuckles, had become unbearable.

The princess was reluctant to have Aoi leave, but the strength of the dream's omen persuaded

her that such a pilgrimage was necessary. Aoi asked the princess to go with her but she would not leave, seeming to cling to her frustration and unhappiness.

Aoi went at once to purify herself and long before dawn was on her way in a simple carriage, with only her serving woman, O-hana, and three outriders. By lunchtime they had reached the Uji River.

O-hana and the men hung a wide curtain for privacy and set out a frugal picnic of pilgrim's food for Aoi—a little rice and some stewed burdock root and onion. She sat watching the men refreshing their horses at the edge of the water, unyoking the ox from the carriage and leading it to drink, first, and then to stand, with a few contented lows, in the lapping coolness. Her hair blew back from her forehead, the wind loosened her robes, puffed into her long sleeves, caused a drift of coolness on her throat; and she felt her tensions ease. There was so much to see, here in the open by the slow-moving river, that she could not remember to worry.

A friend heard that Aoi was passing and sent word that she would be welcome for the night, if she cared to break her journey so soon. Full of the ease of escape from routine and indulg-

ing the whim of the traveler, Aoi accepted. She stayed awake all night watching the cormorant fishers in their boats with lanterns hung over the bows, and all the next day she nodded and drowsed in the dusky carriage as it swung and pitched along the road to Nieno Pond.

It took them three more days to get to the temple. By the time they looked up the mountain-side to the thick round pillars and soaring roof of the main hall, Aoi had come to feel herself a true pilgrim. She had walked a good part of the way, trailing her hand in the grass, brushing at insects, finding with an odd delight that her white footcoverings were dusty and worn. Her long hair became tangled and escaped its ribbons but she would not let O-hana smooth it. "Later," she said, "we'll do it later." Every bird that flew, every flooded field and bending farmer, every flower and roadside weed was fresh and new to her. In the evenings when they stopped at some small temple for the night, she would reprove herself for her joy in the trip, only to start again the next day with the same avid and observing eye. At Tshubaichi they stopped so that Aoi could rest and prepare herself for the ascent to the temple. Then she let O-hana work away the unevenness of



her hair and provide her with fresh clothes, she recalled the dream and the need for sobriety and prayer, she emptied herself of interest, concern, worry, irritation, curiosity, weariness. She began to prepare her mind to approach the Buddha.

Just at dawn, the two women took the steep path up the mountain. The carriage would wait at Tsubaichi until their return in three days; the horsemen left their mounts and accompanied them, but they would come back down to wait with the ox-driver. Aoi and O-hana walked over the springy needle-loam of the forest road dressed all in white, with thin white robes held over their heads to hide their faces. Already other pilgrims were travelling in both directions. Thrush and plover sang among the thick branches of pine, cedar, and maple, and a chill mist drifted around their feet. The last part of the way was across a bridge over the river and up steps cut into the mountain, edged with worn lengths of cedar logs.

Aoi felt all these details of the pathway, but her mind was not on them. She was experiencing the expanding lightness of spirit that comes with release of the self.

The monks of the temple were assembling for prayer in the main hall when Aoi and her

party arrived. Sending the men back, Aoi entered the Hall of Purification. O-hana, too, washed her hands with the sacred water and, after brief prayers, settled near the back of the hall to wait until she was needed. The temple bell boomed, startling Aoi with the solidity of its sound so near at hand, and the monks' voices began, a deep drone, covering even the sound of the river, which ran over rapids not far away. Aoi felt her mind lift and shape itself around ringing nothingness as the heavy bell tone spread and thinned and vibrated away.

All that day she read sutras, prayed, and meditated in the outer room of the main hall, concealed behind a curtain-screen. At night a young monk came to assist her by lighting votive candles before the golden image of Buddha in the inner hall. She slept in a pilgrim's room in the south corner of the grounds.

It was into this peaceful haven away from the world that violence came, more shocking than it would have been anywhere else, more destructive, yet in the end, redeeming.

**A**oi woke early on that first morning. The shutters of her room had been left open onto a low verandah which was only

a step up from a bare-earth path. Beyond the path was a grove of trees where small huts for meditating monks were set at odd angles that kept each one from direct sight of any other. She opened her eyes to light but to a complete absence of vision beyond her immediate position. Fog like the inside of a cloud covered the mountain. In an exalted state from her long hours of prayer, Aoi found this absence of a world she knew was there to be the perfect condition for the devout Buddhist. Here there was nothing but at the same time everything.

She began to muse on the Chinese character *mu*, which represents the idea of nothingness. Was there ever a symbol more full of the elements of concreteness? It has a top and bars that are reinforced, a bottom and four bits of flame, black and static. Was it that, in representing the frightening idea of total absence of everything, we must comfort ourselves by giving the letter so much structure, as if to contain this awful concept, put limits around it?

Rising from her pallet, she moved toward the open door, wanting to put herself into total isolation in the fog. She stood on the path, facing away from the building, straining her eyes open in spite of herself in an unconscious effort to see. It was

as if her eyes had ceased to function.

Running footsteps approaching drew her back with a snap from her thoughts, and she instinctively put out her hands in that direction, just in time to ward off a man who collided with her, released a grunt of foul breath in her face; and spun away to disappear at once in the direction of the grove.

That was the end of meditation for Aoi. Though she had come close to a peak of understanding through long preparation and a journey of the spirit, she could not recover detachment and serenity after abrupt physical contact with a stranger. She returned to her room and took out her writing box.

Standing in white fog  
My eyes are useless as gems,  
Straining to see truth,  
When all along it is there—  
Void is all and all is void.

She wrote the poem, thinking it was something she could salvage from the peace she had just lost. For a while there was quiet, but soon muted shouts and the hushed bustle of alarm told her that something was wrong in Haseh Temple. Rousing O-hana, she sent her down the mountain to bring the men. If there was to be trouble, three

strong men from the capital could only be a help, whatever the situation.

By the time O-hana returned with the outriders, the broken routine of the temple was apparent to Aoi, even though she had not left her room. No drone of prayer succeeded the sounding of the bell and that, when it came, was at first tentative, with a stutter, then an awful clanging bang, as if whoever rang it found some release in drawing back the heavy log suspended just beside the bell and slamming it forward. Soon after that, the prayer sound began, an intense bass tone that occasionally rose and dropped, like wailing suppressed.

Aoi chose the oldest of her men to go and find out what had happened. He was gone an unexpectedly long time, and when he returned he was shaking his head.

"They won't say what it is. Only that there has been a calamity."

Aoi nodded and said that they must wait for a while to see what they should do. She was sure they would have to leave; a temple in stress was no place for pilgrims.

While they waited, the fog thinned until the trees of the grove across the path emerged as flat shadows layered against the lighter shadow of the moun-

tain that rose behind them and the even lighter shadow of the mountain behind that. Aoi put her mind to remembering in detail her encounter with the man on the path. Running men in times of trouble are best recalled, she thought. She found that her memory of it left out the sense of sight but was acute in other ways. Especially strong was a tactile memory, some quality of his clothing that had made it cling to her fingers. She had the feeling that she should know what cloth it was that felt like that, but the precise definition would not come. For someone with so much experience of dyeing and sewing robes, it was frustrating. His breath in her face she would not forget, and the impression of solid bulk against her hands. She tried to fix in her mind the exact tone of his brief grunt of surprise.

After a while O-hana realized that they had not eaten, and she went in search of rice. She returned with a tray full of covered soup bowls and rice-balls and with solemn assurance that something terrible had happened. "You can always tell in the kitchen how things are in the great hall," she said. Aoi was served and ate alone, aware of the tense whispers of the others in an adjoining room, which seemed to her to be part of a gauzy web of fright and

unease that had threaded into this holy place. Because of her encounter on the path, she decided to go to the abbot.

“**T**hough I have not yet heard what the trouble is, I may be able to help, if you can find the time to see me.”

This was written on a piece of pale gray paper, with an added sentence expressing her humility and deference; then she passed it to O-hana, who gave it to one of the men to deliver.

The fog dissolved into a drizzling rain that sent dampness into even the most tightly closed interiors. Strong in her patience, Aoi sat by a small brazier and waited. She had lost all interest in religion, but the fascination of emptiness as a complicated idea was still with her.

It was not until late in the Hour of the Rat that her summons came. Telling herself that it was because of the deep darkness of near-midnight, not admitting the sense of danger she felt, Aoi asked one of her men to go with her, and they followed the monk who had come for her. She walked as serenely as she could, stepping carefully in high wooden clogs, noticing how lightly the rain fell on the oiled paper of the umbrella her man held over her. Her robes

were heavy and limp, clammy against her skin.

The entrance to the abbot's hall was guarded by two young men in brown monks' robes who looked strong and not at all devout. Aoi knew that many who populated the monasteries these days were there not to answer a religious calling but to do the work of the fields and to protect against plunderers and even quarrelsome tax men. Leaving her man with the guards, she entered the abbot's reception room.

He sat alone on a cushion beside a writing table, an old man, bald like all monks, wearing white robes soft from many washings, his face stretched and gaunt, the eyes, even in such dim light, clear and brilliant. Aoi felt the force of the old man's spirit through those eyes. She bowed.

“I am Senkan,” he said.

“I don't know how I can exist, after disturbing you at such a time.”

He inclined his head but did not answer.

“Would it be possible that I could know what has happened?”

He only looked at her. Aoi faltered on.

“Because, you see . . . I was almost knocked off my feet this morning by a monk who came running out of the fog.” She re-

lated the incident in detail, watching heavy lids cover the eyes, not sure even if he listened. She stopped speaking and still he sat unresponding. Just as Aoi had decided that she was being dismissed, he stirred and looked up.

"A monk, you say?"

"Yes, I am sure of it." But how did I know that, she was thinking, still worrying her memory, feeling again the pull against her fingertips when contact with his robes was broken. It had been the pull of loose threads, she suddenly realized, and of coarse dye, and the robe must have been one of those made from rags stitched together and dyed a uniform color. Such garments were sometimes favored by those who wished to emphasize, in the old way, their acceptance of the rules of priestly poverty.

Aoi told him what had happened, and the abbot's shoulders rose as she spoke, his posture changed, he leaned toward her and she saw his serenity deepen.

"Indeed such a man running on the path at that hour seems unusual enough for me to think it has significance. Would you know him again?"

"I cannot say. But . . . forgive me . . . what has he done?"

The eyelids came down halfway and the old face expressed

sadness such as Aoi had never seen.

"Someone . . . has killed the abbot."

Aoi's amazement was so complete that she could not speak.

"I am not the abbot, I am only the oldest member, a simple monk who leads a life of prayer. But because of . . . certain difficulties, I have had to come to this room and give directions to the others."

He went on to explain. The slain abbot had risen quickly to his position as head of the temple because of an extraordinary revelation bestowed on him after long and severe self-discipline. Though he had been still a young man, he had possessed such strength of will and purity of heart that he had reached a state of holiness often denied after a lifetime of devotion. In the short time he had been abbot, he had changed many things. Laxness had been intolerable to him; he had forced all members to observe every prayer time, even those who worked in the fields and patrolled the grounds. The present-day inclination of monks to ignore the rules of inoffensiveness, chastity, poverty, abstinence had filled him with loathing, and he had been taking strict measures to remove offenders. "There has been recent conflict with all three of

those next in line to the abbot. That is why I had to come out of my retreat."

Aoi asked why the guards had not protected their abbot.

"There have been no guards until today," was the answer.

She asked many more questions, and when she left, she had a full understanding of the situation at Haseh Temple and had agreed to help the temporary abbot by being present at the questioning of the three head monks, and others if necessary. She would try to identify the one who had been on the path in the fog. By the time she returned to her room in the pilgrims' quarters, the rain had increased to a downpour that bounced on the stones of the dark path and ran in streams from the overhanging pines. Though she had thought herself too wakeful and disturbed for sleep, she fell at once into an illusion that the rain was the steady descent of blessing from the Buddha, and she slept deeply.

In the morning the sun shot slanting bars through the rain-sparkled trees after it cleared the eastern slope of the farthest mountain. Birds sang and called from the grove, and everywhere the green of new growth was luminous. Aoi dressed for comfort, choosing a series of light unlined robes and a simple

Chinese jacket. For now, it was best that she dress as a court lady and give up her pilgrim's role. What she had to do that day she would do as a woman of standing and unusual learning.

O-hana was given careful instructions to go, with one of the men, to Tsubaichi. She was to find large white mushrooms, a little rice wine, a piece of raw meat, and a small wooden box. These were to be prepared in a certain way while Aoi was with the abbot. Aoi went, just after morning prayers, to sit behind her curtain-screen in the abbot's room while he questioned three men. The curtains obscured her view, but she arranged a space between two of the panels of silk so she could see Senkan and his visitors.

The temporary abbot had explained each man's position in the monastery. First to come in was Jozo. He was in charge of all the working monks and, like them, was young and robust. His voice was deep, his build stocky, and he wore a smooth heavy robe. The abbot asked him about the nature of his disagreement with the abbot, which Jozo made no attempt to hide.

"He took away our weapons."

There was no surprise on Senkan's face; he had known of weapons in the temple. "Car-

rying weapons is against all the Buddha's teachings," he said mildly. "Your abbot meant to return to the law."

Jozo's temper boiled easily. "Times have changed. We cannot keep the peasants off our land. There are robbers in the forest, and those monks from Kudarano Temple are always claiming the boundary fields. They chopped up a whole bed of our seedlings last month."

"You understand, though, that the abbot did not care about property but about the soul of the temple. Where were you yesterday morning before dawn?"

"We used to go out to the fields before dawn, but since we are now required to be at the morning service, we sleep until just before it. I was in my bed in the dormitory."

Senkan dismissed Jozo, his old face unchanged in its kindness and calm.

"Excuse me," Aoi spoke from behind her curtain when Jozo was gone. "Do you know what weapon was used against the abbot?" Aoi could not bring herself to utter the words that described the murder. The abbot's throat had been cut.

"All monks are allowed to possess a razor," was all he said.

Next to enter was Yokei, a monk famous throughout Japan. He had found, when he

was a young novice, a white pheasant on the mountain. The finding of albino birds and animals was always taken as a sign that the reigning emperor was ruling well and assured of long life. Yokei had taken the bird himself to present it to the emperor. That had been fifteen years ago and the emperor had indeed reigned until he was forty-two, when he retired in favor of his brother. The former emperor, now a priest, still lived in Nara, and so the omen was taken as a true one and the man who had discovered and captured the bird had spent his life travelling. He was known in the farthest provinces, and it was said he had visited every temple that existed. Where there was no temple, he stayed with the highest government official or in the home of the village headman. Only this year had he come back to Haseh Temple to live in retirement and, because of his fame as a preacher, had become head teacher for the monastery. He lived strictly according to Buddhist law, never looking at a woman's face, denying himself every pleasure, owning only his clothes, a begging bowl, a razor, and a long staff for walking.

After an exchange of greetings, Senkan spoke deferentially to Yokei. "It is my unhappy duty to question you.



Violence in a temple is a miserable thing, unjust punishment would be even worse. I have heard rumors of angry words between you and our departed abbot."

Yokei sat impassive on his cushion facing the old man. His face was round, as was his shape against the light. Saffron robes gleamed in the brightness. His voice had the well-modulated resonance of the practiced speaker.

"You know, Teacher, that I do not speak in anger." Senkan was an example to all monks and was usually addressed as Teacher.

"Yes, your piety is well-known. I must ask you—forgive me—where you were yesterday before dawn."

"In my hut, Holy One. I sleep very little, and the early hours are best for meditation."

"Forgive me if I persist, but wasn't there some disagreement with the abbot?"

"He had ordered me to go back to travelling and preaching in the summers. I had thought that, after so many years of walking the roads, I might put my energies into teaching and prayer. He said I was needed among the people. I, of course, agreed and was preparing to leave. Now that he is gone . . ." Yokei did not finish the sentence, but Aoi assumed

he meant that he would be needed at the temple after all. "We must strengthen our defenses, so that those robbers from the forest cannot come and go so freely."

Senkan apologized again—but with such a calm, almost-smiling face that his words had no humility—and Yokei left after bowing with deep respect. Aoi noticed the lithe agility of his movements.

"Ah, my lady," Senkan spoke in a pleasant voice to Aoi. "This is not work I like, to doubt the word of my fellows." He sighed and looked out at the garden to his left. Drops still fell from the leaves of bamboo and camellia, and the sand of the path was dark in low spots, where it had not yet dried. A sparrow landed on a slim pine bough, making the green tips bend and shower water into the air. The sound of the rapids was distant here, unnoticed except at times of stillness.

"Well, let us continue. Do you have any comments?"

"Not yet, I think."

Anshu was the name of the next monk. He was a man of early middle years, whose face seemed too young for the silver stubble of his shaved head, whose body was slight and bent. When he sat on the floor before Senkan, the stoop of his shoulders and the angle of his back

took on the shape of some of the statues of Buddha, the posture of long meditation. He had been the abbot's disciple and his deputy in dealing with the outside world.

"Anshu, there is no way for me to express my sorrow." Senkan seemed to Aoi a man who knew everything from one glance of his brilliant eyes. His face reflected Anshu's feelings but with an acceptance still not won by the younger monk. Anshu did not answer but bowed low. Aoi saw his hands contort with brief tension. Senkan continued. "We all know your devotion and the strength of your dedication. There has been no one since the abbot himself who has shown such discipline and understanding."

"No, no. I have never been a worthy disciple."

Senkan paid no attention to this humility.

"And yet, Anshu, you disagreed with your teacher in some serious way recently. It has been known in the monastery."

"Yes, that is true. It was wrong of me to urge him . . ." Anshu stopped speaking because of tears. Aoi could see his struggle for calm.

"This terrible thing that has happened gives me the right to ask you to explain," Senkan said.

Anshu shook his head. "I can-

not. It was a thing between us. I could not stand to see the temple disgraced!" This last burst out of him, but he would say no more. Senkan sat with his calm intact, seemingly not surprised that someone could have considered Haseh Temple disgraced before the brutal murder of its abbot. Is there nothing that can surprise him? Aoi thought. And yet, she too had some idea of what was meant.

Anshu was distressed and apologetic that he would not answer the old man's questions but was firm in his refusals. He said that he had been at prayer before dawn on the previous day, but Senkan's questioning of his whereabouts, with its implication of possible guilt, shocked him into frozen silence. Senkan dismissed him gently and watched with compassion as he moved to the door, his thin frame causing awkward folds in the frayed and faded robe he wore.

"Well," said Senkan, stirring on his cushion, gazing for a long time at the garden, then turning his eyes to the curtain frame behind which Aoi, too, was relaxing from the tension of the interviews. "Anshu, at least, did not mention robbers of the forest."

Aoi smiled to herself. Neither she nor Senkan had given any thought to outside forces. All

because of the irregularity of a running man, she thought, a man we consider to have been a monk.

"We have no proof," she said, "yet I am sure which of them it was."

"You recognized one of them?"

"No. But I know what he was wearing, what kind of man he really is, and why he did it."

"Ah." Senkan did not agree or disagree but Aoi thought that he knew as much as she, though she expected that he would not voice speculation.

"We must expose this man," she said. "I have a plan for a test."

She explained her idea and the preparations already begun. She would not, she said, be ready until evening. The test would be given in the main hall, with all the monastery present. Senkan thought that exposing the criminal monk before an assembly of all would be the only way to clear the temple of the evil brought to it.

Aoi went back to her little room across from the grove. O-hana had carried out her instructions exactly and was keeping watch over a place of disturbed earth beside the verandah, where she had buried a carefully prepared wooden box. Aoi withdrew into privacy, disposed again to read the holy books and to meditate and pray.

After dark, they all walked the worn path that led to the outer chamber of the main hall, and Aoi and O-hana slipped in behind the curtain-screens prepared for them. Aoi and her people were the only pilgrims left; all others had been sent away the day before. They wore the bright clothes in which they would reenter the capital, and Aoi arranged her sleeves and the hems of her skirts so that they showed beyond the curtains. O-hana sat just behind her; her men flanked the curtain screen, wearing the prince's uniform. Aoi meant all this show of color and sumptuous dress to bring into the temple the world in which it existed and the law of the outside. She meant to take from Senkan the burden of revealing and removing a monstrously sinful monk.

The wooden box, stained from its time in the ground, not quite brushed free of all dirt, was placed on a small, low stand that had been covered with a piece of brown homespun cloth. The whole display looked dull and drab against the expanse of polished floor. The monks sat crosslegged in two lines against each side wall, Senkan slightly removed from them and near Aoi's screen. Candles glowed before the Buddha in the inner shrine, and two tall lanterns

had been set on either side of the little box.

Before the solemn business of the test, Senkan began prayers. Aoi looked through the thin, obscuring panels of curtain at the box. It is like the letter *mu*, she thought: concrete yet nothing at all; holding emptiness, yet—for one man—all the world.

When prayers were finished, Senkan spoke. His voice was breathy and thin because of his age but weighted with spiritual authority and heard throughout the hall, even above the sound of the rapids.

"Unexpected help in our trouble has been sent to us by the Buddha," he said. "We have a lady visitor who is learned in Chinese medicine."

The sibilance of indrawn breaths of surprise spun from the lines of monks. It was unusual for a woman to know how to read and write Chinese, the difficult imported language of education and statesmanship. Aoi had asked Senkan not to explain who she was because of the criticism directed toward women who revealed a knowledge of Chinese. It was a skill Aoi usually hid because she did not like being accused of showing off. The claim that she knew Chinese medicine was a great exaggeration but useful for her purpose. Tonight she needed every bit of witchery she could

collect to herself, and the spectre of an educated woman was a good beginning.

Senkan spoke at length, explaining the mysticism of the test. He called Jozo, the monk who directed field work and defense, Yokei, the monk famous for discovering a white pheasant, and Anshu, close disciple of the murdered abbot, and had them sit side by side facing both the box on its stand and Aoi, invisible except for the shimmering colors of her robes where they spilled out under the curtain. These three, as the three highest in standing, were to begin.

"In the box," said Aoi, deliberately making her voice deep and speaking slowly, "are mushrooms harmless to all." Again the sound of breath issued from the lines of seated monks. Unknown mushrooms were not willingly approached. Aoi continued. "But they have a peculiar ability. If they are buried until they sweat..." she paused to let the uneasy breaths be heard and subside, "...they can become poison to one who lies." Now there was only silence in the hall.

Two of Aoi's men moved to sit on either side of the box. They lifted it so that all could see and then offered it to the Buddha, bowing, and replaced it on the stand. One of them removed the

lid, and at once all those near to it, the guards and the three monks facing them, drew back. Aoi hoped that it was because of the stench of rotten meat and stale wine she had arranged for, in that tightly closed box. She knew that what was revealed inside was a row of spotted and clammy mushrooms, slicked with dampness, lying on a piece of white cloth. From under the cover of the stand, a square lacquer tray, a knife, and a pair of chopsticks were removed. The left-hand guard lifted out a mushroom with chopsticks, placed it on the tray, cut it into three slices, which he separated and arranged carefully.

"Jozo, I ask you to swear that you did not kill the abbot and then to eat of this mushroom," Aoi said from behind the screen. Jozo sat straighter, set his arms out from his body, as if preparing for combat, then with decisive movements took his chopsticks from the front fold of his robe, picked up the slice of mushroom nearest him, chewed and swallowed it quickly. He sat gazing at the guards, unaffected.

"Yokei, you of the famous white pheasant, do you swear you did not kill the abbot and can you eat of this mushroom?"

Yokei moved slowly to take out his chopsticks and carry a

slice of brown-spotted mushroom to his mouth, which he barely opened. The mushroom slice disappeared but there was no motion of the jaw. "Eat!" Senkan commanded, from his position at the side. With one swallow, Yokei obeyed. All watched carefully, but he sat on, impassive. Aoi found it necessary to control a certain quaking inside her. She concentrated on producing a firm voice.

"Anshu, will you swear you did not harm the abbot?"

"Yes," he said.

"Then eat." Anshu had his chopsticks ready and reached at once for the remaining bit of mushroom. He had it halfway to his mouth, when Yokei beside him fell forward onto the floor. Anshu's hand stopped in mid-air, and he looked at Senkan. The old monk nodded, the chopsticks finished their journey, Anshu ate without hesitation. For half a minute no one moved. Then Yokei heaved and ejected the bit of mushroom onto the floor. It was still whole, he had pretended to swallow.

Amid sudden shouting, Aoi's men grasped Yokei's arms and pulled him upright. He was crying, spitting, wiping his tongue, shaking his head, too pitiful and abject to remain in their sight. Half-carried, he was taken the length of the hall, down the steps, and into the

night. Jozo rose also and followed, calling his men to him.

The first lines of the sutra came from Aoi, who was shaking with grief for a world in which even monks could fall into evil ways.

"For the body is a weak thing and the holy man puts no trust in it," the sutra says. Aoi intoned the words and the monks took it up.

It desires meat to eat and makes itself foul.

It desires strong drink and deceives itself.

It leads us into falseness by the strength of its desires.

The dismal catalogue of the failings of the flesh continued and then became a list of the glories of redemption. Aoi, behind her screen, began saying to herself the name of Amida. It seemed the best way to pray for Yokei, who, if he were but to say that holy name with a true heart, could still enter paradise.

"There is something about mushrooms," Aoi said the next day to Senkan, "that leads to uneasiness." She sat again in the abbot's reception room. It was early morning, and she was taking her leave of the old man who had

come from holy retreat to guide his temple through disastrous trouble. He sat with that stiffness peculiar to those whose life is in the soul. Aoi thought that she would never forget his clear and steady eyes.

"It was truly a harmless mushroom?"

"Yes. The whole test was a deceit and nothing to do with China or with medicine. I am afraid I relied on Yokei's guilt to make him betray himself."

"How did you know he was the one?"

"There were several things. The man on the path wore robes of patched-together rags. I finally realized that the loose threads I had felt had been on the middle of his arm, and a patched robe was the only way to account for that. Also, to those of us used to dyeing, saffron dye gives a certain fullness to cloth."

"Um." Senken seemed to be listening without interest. Aoi knew that he, too, had deduced that Yokei was guilty, but by some other means than the tactile feel of cloth.

"And then," she continued, "I had been exposed to his breath. He had been eating meat and drinking wine. I thought that a travelling priest who visited and was honored in the houses of officials would be most likely to fall into bad hab-

its and break the Buddhist law. When I saw how plump he was, I was sure I was right."

There was slight movement of Senkan's features. Aoi had come to the important thing. Grief and pity charged his face. "It is as you say. He travelled for so long that he became his own law and saw nothing wrong in yielding to the desires of the flesh. His hosts never questioned anything he did, because of his reputation." Senkan half-closed his eyes, and Aoi wondered if Yokei's weakness of the flesh had been for more than meat and wine. "He affected those patched clothes and made a show of poverty, reproving monks who owned more than he. Then when he became sick, he wanted to stay here. But the abbot knew what he was and told him he must save his soul by preaching and doing good works among the people. He tried to refuse." The old man stopped, turned his head toward the garden where the wind shook the pinetops, and rubbed his arm above the elbow. "Ah-h-h." In this long breath was all the monk's longing for a pure land where such a recital of struggle and disharmony would never be necessary.

"And Anshu," Aoi spoke gently, unwilling to add to his distress but compelled to finish the explanation, "knew also and

feared the abbot would not drive Yokei out."

"Anshu has much holiness, but he has not enough trust." Still facing the garden, still rubbing his arm, as if to soothe an ache, Senkan spoke in a distant voice. He was thinking of another thing, which apparently, when he turned back to Aoi, he had decided to tell her. "The abbot himself was almost led into sin by that man. We found a kitchen knife concealed in his clothes." The greatest sadness of all now weighted Senkan's eyelids. "Yokei must have threatened him. But for a monk like the abbot to use a weapon, even for defense, would have meant the loss of everything for him. So it might perhaps be that Yokei saved him from sin when he caught him by surprise and took his life."

Aoi felt her throat tighten and knew she could not speak. Senkan dropped his head a little, and she prepared to leave. He will go back now, she thought, to his hut in the grove and the peaceful retreat that he must long for. One last question occurred to her.

"It is perhaps rude of me to ask, but how did you know even the most secret currents of life in the temple, though you were in retreat for prayer and meditation?"

The stillness came back to



Senkan's face, with a smile so slight Aoi could hardly see where it appeared. It was as if light originated within him.

"The more we retreat, the more we see and the more they all tell us, murmuring at the door at night; whispering behind the food tray. They know, you see, that we pray for all the world."

**T**he outriders walked two before and one behind Aoi and O-hana as they all descended the mountain steps, crossed the bridge over the bounding river, and entered the town of Tsubaichi. Already pilgrims were passing them, making the ascent to Haseh Temple, not knowing the reason for the short ban on visitors.

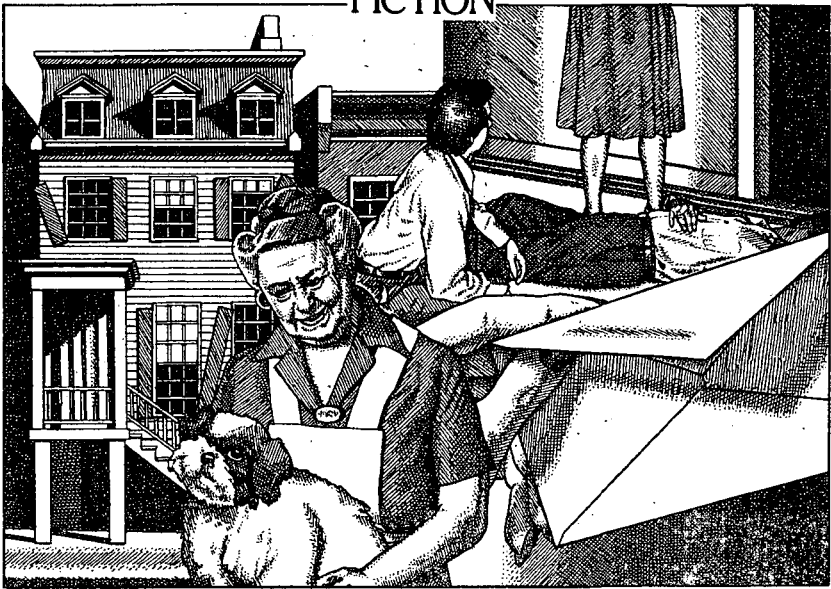
The carriage and driver were at the inn, the ox ready in the traces, and the horses saddled. They set out at once on their return journey. Early in the afternoon, a messenger from Senkan caught up with them and passed a note to Aoi in the carriage.

"Yokei overcame his guards

and threw himself in the rapids. He was heard to call on the name of Amida as he fell."

Soon after that it began to rain, a blowing downpour that pelted the roof of the carriage and flew in around the curtains at either end. The ox bellowed with discomfort, the driver shouted to encourage him. Aoi sat with O-hana in grim endurance.

She was trying to see these two deaths in terms of salvation. She found it comforting that Yokei, a man so utterly lost to goodness, should have saved his soul as he lost his life. Seeing him as the instrument of redemption for the abbot was harder, but Aoi was willing to let Senkan instruct her in that. She felt empty of spiritual resources, and she turned her mind gladly to thoughts of the princess and her jealousy. It was a relief to consider mundane instead of metaphysical problems, and she was so tired that she did not even compose a poem about it. The carriage lurched and creaked along the muddy road back to the capital.



# The Winning Hand

by Donald Olson

**C**radling her fat little dog in one plump arm, Mrs. Hockenberry fished a white pill from the vial, moistened it between her own dollbaby lips, and then deftly popped it into Frenchy's mouth.

"He won't take it if I don't put it in my mouth first, will you, sweetums?" she explained. "Now as soon as the nasty rain lets up, nice Mr. Gregson will take you for a lovely long walk."

Nice Mr. Gregson put down the cup of tea his landlady had pressed upon him and crossed to the bay window overlooking a fenced-in area Mrs. Hocken-

berry called "the garden," a dark, sunless enclosure where in fact only the stubbornest weeds poked through a rotting blanket of horsechestnuts.

When he had inquired about the apartment a week earlier, Mrs. Hockenberry had apologized for the dusty sign in an upper window, regretted that none of her three vacant flats was for rent. "Doctor's orders." Although her stout little body and crumpled rose petal cheeks betrayed no visible sign of illness, she declared, almost boastfully, that she was "not at all well," hadn't even the

*Illustration by Ron Chironna*

strength to climb the long flight of stairs rising from a drafty vestibule to remove the sign from the window. It was all she could do to tend the three stray cats she housed in one vacant lower apartment. To bother with human tenants would quite "finish her off."

Nevertheless, she had invited him into her exceedingly cluttered but homey living room where windows, doorways, and fireplace mantel were still festooned, three months after the holiday, with tired looking Christmas garlands. "They're such fun to put up," she babbled in her screechy, high-pitched voice, following his amused gaze, "but such a chore to put away. Feeling like I do and all."

He could not have said what sudden impulse caused her to change her mind about having him as a tenant. Under rumpled lids her jolly blue eyes inspected him with the shrewd appraisal of an experienced landlady, but with as little distrust as the dog Frenchy, half snoozing on a sheet-draped sofa beside a tall, faded Christmas tree which the prospective tenant suspected had become a permanent feature of the decor. Something in the old lady's smiling expression seemed to approve of whatever she saw in the lanky, thirtyish man with his noncommittal bank-teller's face: he had well-groomed dark

brown hair graying at the temples, a perfectly trimmed mustache, and quietly attentive brown eyes behind horn-rimmed glasses. In any event, she suggested she *might* consider renting the two-room upper if he was willing to take it as it was and do a few favors for her now and then, odd jobs, a little yard work, and walking Frenchy, which she hadn't been able to do herself since her illness.

"There's no refrigerator!" she announced sharply, as if he mustn't think she was keeping anything back. "Old one went on the blink months ago, and I haven't got around to replacing it. You're welcome to store perishables in mine if that's not inconvenient."

The setup being precisely what he had scarcely dared hope to find, he was quite willing to accept this minor nuisance. It wouldn't be for long, although he didn't tell her this. In the following days it had become apparent that Mrs. Hockenberry wasn't the least concerned with anything's being done about the place, which she intended to sell anyway in the near future and remove herself to the country where she owned a cottage. No, all she really wanted from her tenant was his occasional company, the security of his presence in the house at night, and his services as a dog walker. Thereafter, with

excuses as flimsy as wanting him to attach a drapery hook that had come unfastened, she would invite him into her apartment to share a cup of tea or a glass of raspberry brandy, a bottle of which was always in evidence amidst the mountainous clutter on a card table she used as a desk, and then she would talk, talk, talk as if for years she had been deprived of so willing and attentive a listener as "nice Mr. Gregson."

Her stories were mostly about the past, long before she came to Brooklyn. "... As if it were yesterday, I can see it now. The orchard one huge mass of apple blossoms. I'd been pestering Daddy for weeks to make me a swing. I was eight at the time. I stood beside the road waiting for the school bus, and I saw Daddy come out of the barn with a ladder over one shoulder and a coil of rope over the other. He waved to me just before I got on the bus, and all morning long I dreamed about swinging, swinging, swinging right up into those clouds of pink and white apple blossoms." She paused, plucked at her eyes with a hanky. "Auntie Ruth came for me at noon. I didn't learn the truth for months. They just said something about an accident, a fall from the ladder, but eventually one of my cousins let the cat out of the bag. No accident. No swing. Daddy

had hanged himself in the orchard that morning. He never had got over Mama's dying that spring... Well, anyway, you asked me how I happened to end up here, and that's the story. They sent me off to live with Aunt Mary and Uncle Joe. Uncle Joe owned four houses on this block in those days. For years after they were gone I had fifteen people coming in every month to pay their rent. Now there's no one. I don't even know the neighbors' names. Just nod to them when I take Frenchy for his walk... oh, look there! Look at those little ears prick up the minute I say the word walk. Yes, sweetums, I'm sure nice Mr. Gregson will take you for a walk soon as the rain stops."

Nice Mr. Gregson glanced at his watch. "It's hardly more than a mist now. We'd better go while we've got the chance."

Today, much to the tenant's annoyance, Frenchy insisted on stopping at almost every tree and lamppost along the boulevard. Strained to the limit by the rambling length of Mrs. Hockenberry's story, the young man's patience evaporated long before they reached the phone booth outside the drugstore.

The phone was ringing by the time they got there. He held tight to Frenchy's leash and

grabbed off the receiver. "Lorraine?"

"Oh, God, I was getting frantic. First it was busy for twenty minutes and then it just kept ringing. Are you all right?"

"Of course. What's happened?"

"Nothing. I mean, as far as I know. Darling, I don't know how much more of this I can take. I almost die every time the phone rings. I think they're calling to tell me they've found—"

"Now stop it, honey. They're not going to find anything. I made sure of that."

A despairing wail came over the wire.

"I keep thinking they *know* I've been lying about everything. The way that detective looks at me. Oh, darling, maybe we ought to just tell the truth."

He tried to keep the vexation out of his voice. "You know it's too late for that. He's dead, Lorr. Dead and buried. How could we possibly explain that?"

"I shouldn't have let you do it," she cried. "If only we hadn't lost our heads."

He tried not to be infected by her air of helplessness. "You must be patient, love. Everything is going just the way I planned."

"But what about *her*? Does she suspect anything?"

"How could she? I told you

before, she's just a sweet little old lady who believes in minding her own business. Like everyone else around here."

"But if she happened to hear about it. See something in the paper..."

"What paper? Our own paper did no more than mention Freddy's disappearance. Hardly the sort of thing the *New York Times* would pick up on, and that's the only paper the old dear reads. Now you must believe me, darling. My plan is working. There's not a thing to worry about."

She refused to be comforted. "If you'd only tell me what it is, this brilliant plan of yours."

"Less you know the safer it is for you. And whatever happens has to come as a surprise. You're not the world's greatest actress."

This provoked a hollow attempt at laughter. "I only hope you're half as good an actor as you claim to be."

He had told Mrs. Hockenberry that he was a writer, a technical writer by profession, and that his current assignment had brought him to New York but that he aspired to write fiction. This was a mistake. She took it as an invitation to besiege him with even more stories from her past. "Can you use that?" she would in-

quire hopefully, or, "Can't you make a story out of that?" Occasionally she would digress from recollections of her youthful days in "the Valley" to talk about her numerous erstwhile tenants; only then did he discover that she was a widow "by choice," as she put it.

"Grass widow, that's the right term, isn't it, dear? Bygones are bygones, and we're all entitled to at least one mistake in our lives. Charlie was mine. When Auntie died and left me with all these apartments to manage, that man was a godsend to me. Until it turned out he was sent by the devil and not the Man Upstairs. Perfect tenant he'd been for years and when he popped the question I thought, why not? I wasn't exactly younger than springtime, and I sure needed all the help I could get. Folks warned me he was only after my money, but did I listen? You want to know about Charlie? You want to know what Charlie was? A hit man! Oh, ha ha, not the kind you people write those awful stories about. I mean he was a feller who hit the bottle, hit me, and hit the road. In that order. Tried to romance every single female tenant we had. Happiest day in my life was when I got up the gumption to toss him out on his ear. After that I had the good sense to sell off all the houses except this one, and this

one goes on the market before the year is out."

He had rented a typewriter at a nearby stationery store the day after he moved in, and although his little flat was too far removed from Mrs. Hockenberry's, being upstairs and on the opposite side of the house, he passed the time writing whatever came into his head simply to give credence to the role he was playing. Once he even wrote out a kind of "confession" of what others, not knowing the truth, would have called his crime.

"Freddy Abelard was drinking heavily the night Lorraine called me from the phone in her room where she had locked herself in. It wasn't the first time her husband had beaten her, and she was terrified. No one but Lorraine was aware of the darker, sadistic side of Dr. Abelard's nature. Among his friends and patients he enjoyed immense popularity, and among his colleagues untarnished respect. Nor did anyone but Lorraine know that his periodic sudden trips out of town were not to rest up from the rigors of his practice as a surgeon but to enjoy among strangers profligate sprees of self-indulgence. I discovered later that what had sent him into such a murderous rage that night was Lorraine's decision to ask him for a divorce. Until then Abelard was

not even aware of my existence.

"Lorraine came down when she heard us arguing. Totally disregarding my presence, he snatched up a poker from the fireplace and lunged at her. I pulled him away and we fought. I was no match for him in his maddened state, but when I landed a punch on his nose and he started bleeding, he lost all control. He rushed at me with the poker. Behind him, Lorraine grabbed up a heavy brass vase and swung it. It was no more than a glancing blow, but in falling, his head struck the grate. When it became apparent he was dead, I knew even then what we *should* do. But the evidence was damning. Abelard was not only popular, he had powerful friends in the community. I was still virtually a stranger. I would have done anything to protect Lorraine from scandal—and possibly worse. Still, the idea might not have occurred to me but for three facts: Freddy's habit of disappearing on those frequently prolonged binges; my own announced plans of leaving town for several weeks the next morning; and the sight of Freddy's medical bag lying on the hall table where he had dropped it.

"I told Lorraine that if there was the remotest chance we could make it appear that Abelard had simply vanished on

one of his 'vacations,' it would be worth the risk."

"While I'm here," he said casually, upon returning from the following afternoon's walk with Frenchy, "I'd better take one of those steaks I put in your freezer for my dinner."

In the untidy kitchen he appeared to deliberate over the few packages of meat he had wrapped securely and marked with his name and the contents. As he lifted out one marked "steak," Mrs. Hockenberry ventured a shy suggestion: "I think I'll have steak tonight, too. Why don't you leave yours here to thaw out and I'll fix us a nice meal. A green salad and two lovely baked potatoes."

"That's awfully kind of you," he replied, "but let me take a raincheck. I have to go out right after dinner and might not be back until late."

He returned to his apartment, stood for a moment holding the package in his hand, then laid it, still wrapped, on top of the small kitchen range. The walk had made him hungry but now, quite suddenly, he found that he had no appetite.

The weather, after days of rain, had cleared and turned brisk, and this together with his relief



upon approaching the end of his period of waiting and inactivity lifted his spirits while he waited in the booth for Lorraine's call.

"What news?" he asked her.

"I hadn't heard a word, so I made myself call the detective. He had nothing to tell me. He seemed almost human for a change. As if he might be ready to believe what I told him about Freddy's dropping hints for the last few weeks about chucking everything and just taking off, being fed up with everything here. If only that nurse of his hadn't insisted Freddy wouldn't just disappear of his own accord on the evening before he was due to perform an operation on the mayor's son. And if only they hadn't found that spot of blood on the carpet. I was so sure there wasn't a trace left. At least I didn't have to lie about that. Freddy *did* have a nosebleed."

"No one's mentioned my name?"

"No. Thank God we were always so careful not to be seen together."

He could tell from her voice that, although she was no less anxious, the passage of these last two weeks with no unforeseen complications was building at least a shaky foundation of hope in her mind.

"I told you it would all work out, darling. Now listen. I'm going to put the letter in the

mail tonight. You should have it Friday. When I talk to you then I'll tell you exactly what to do."

Her tone did not echo his optimism. "And what then? What about afterwards?"

"Don't worry about afterwards. One step at a time, remember?"

Once back in his apartment, he drew on a pair of white cotton gloves, stuck a sheet of paper in the typewriter on the kitchen table, and wrote the letter he had already composed so many times in his mind. Having practiced Freddy's signature for hours, he was able to dash it off without, he felt sure, the slightest telltale tremor of forgery. Then he rose, stepped to the range, and began unwrapping the package marked "steak."

Despite his assurances to Lorraine, he had to admit to himself a certain element of wonderment at the success, so far, of the plan he had devised so hastily the night Freddy died. He knew it wouldn't have had a chance if the police had had any reason to connect his departure with Freddy's. His few acquaintances in North Point knew of his plans to leave town; what family he had left lived on the West Coast. He had sold his car to a used car dealer a thousand miles from North Point after making scrupu-

lously certain no trace remained of its having transported a body. As for the body itself... no, he preferred never to think about that gruesome night's work.

Wrong? Yes, of course it had been wrong, but the wrongness of what he had done was inconsequential when compared with the wrongness of Lorraine's being possibly charged and even convicted of her husband's murder.

And it could have happened. Such things did happen every day.

On Friday Lorraine confirmed the receipt of his letter.

"Good. Now listen closely, darling. At nine tonight call Mrs. Hockenberry. Tell her you want to talk to Dr. Abelard. She'll say you've got the wrong number. Tell her you have my letter in front of you with the address and that you got her phone number from the telephone company."

"Could I have, with just the address?"

"I don't know. It doesn't matter. When you describe me she'll know it's me. I'll be out when you call so she won't be able to get me to the phone. Now, when you've done that, call that detective, tell him about the letter, and that you tried to reach me. He'll want to see it so be careful you don't smudge it more than necessary. But I've

already told you that. We want them to get identifiable prints from it. Whether they'll send someone out here or work through the local cops I don't know. It doesn't matter. I'll be gone by then. We'll wait a week, and then I'll call you. By then we'll know if the whole thing worked. Which it will, don't worry."

"Maybe they won't even bother to send anyone to check," she suggested without conviction. "But if they do, suppose they show her Freddy's picture."

"I'm sure they will. The one you gave them is the worst you had, remember. We destroyed all the others. Anyone who knew Freddy and saw me now would know at a glance I wasn't him. But luckily we looked enough alike that with all the little touches—hair coloring, mustache, glasses—the old dear will give a convincing description. And with the prints they lift from the letter and in the apartment here, they'll have no reason to be suspicious."

"But they'll be *your* prints!"

"No, love, they will not be my prints. I'll explain all that later. Just do as I say and everything will be fine. We'll be together before you know it."

"Promise me nothing will go wrong. Promise me!"

"I promise. It's been a risky game, I admit that, but we hold

the winning hand. Take my word for it."

**"I** said, dear, what shall I do about walking Frenchy when you're gone?"

He glanced sharply across at her. "You're thinking of evicting me?"

"Oh, *never*. You're the best thing that's happened to me in years."

The extravagance of this remark nevertheless touched him, left him briefly ashamed of the deception he had practiced. He decided it was only fair to warn her that he would be leaving, in fact, sooner than he'd planned. She seemed not too surprised at the news.

"I didn't for a minute expect you to remain forever. Ah, well, we shall manage, won't we, sweetums?" She gave the dog an affectionate hug. "I'll just have to hire the boy next door to walk you, or let you out into the garden. She loves the garden, don't you, French? Though it's quite messy enough without you adding to it."

As he walked Frenchy for the last time, he reflected upon that sureness of instinct that had led him to pick this particular city and neighborhood in which to implement his plan. The faces around him were singularly devoid of curiosity; eyes that collided momentarily with his

betrayed nothing but a cultivated uninterest. Even among the closest neighbors he observed none of that atmosphere of easy trust to which he was so accustomed in North Point and those other small towns where he had lived. A man could bury himself for years in one of these roominghouses or apartment buildings without acquiring more than a nodding acquaintance with his fellow occupants.

Aware of his fugitive status, he was glad it was only temporary. Soon an even vaster distance would separate him and Lorraine from the scene of that frightful and unexpectedly calamitous incident. They would be together: new names, new lives. No longer kids, still they were young enough for a fresh beginning.

For an hour upon his return to the house he busied himself with preparations for flight. He packed his few clothes and personal articles. He had already returned the typewriter. Presently, wearing gloves, he began tidying the apartment, wiping down even those surfaces which he knew he had never touched. That done, he steeled himself to the final and most essential task, swallowing the disgust that was as strong now as when he had taken Freddy's scalpel in hand and done what had to be done.

The winning hand. The sar-

donic humor implicit in that phrase he had used in talking to Lorraine provoked a bitter smile as he removed from the plastic bag that grisly memento he had carried away with him from the spot where he had buried Freddy's body. Hand in hand, so to speak, he methodically implanted about the apartment the indisputable evidence of its occupant's identity.

Later, under cover of rain and darkness, he stole from the apartment, confident that Mrs. Hockenberry, brandy glass in hand, would be sleepily absorbed in her television programs, and made his way around the house to the garden gate. Despite his care the rusty latch squeaked as he lifted it. From behind the drapery-shrouded windows erupted a flurry of barking. He didn't worry unduly; only if the dog detected the presence of someone at the front entrance would his mistress bestir herself to investigate.

With the trowel he had bought he brushed aside the mound of horsechestnuts and dug a hole deep enough to bury the limp, blood-drained object that had served its final purpose.

Minutes later, pausing in the center of the bridge four blocks away, he dropped the trowel, wrapped in the cotton gloves, into the murky water below. Under the streetlight he checked

the time. Lorraine would be placing her call in an hour. As if the sudden wave of depression engulfing him were as palpable a force as the cold October wind sweeping across the bridge, he turned up his coat collar and walked briskly toward the nearest bar.

She must have been watching for him. The porchlight came on and her door opened as he stepped into the vestibule.

"Oh, come in, come in quick!" she cried shrilly, as if he had arrived in the midst of some dreadful domestic crisis.

Pulling off his hat, he followed her into the living room. "What is it, Mrs. Hockenberry? Are you ill?"

"Ill? My dear man, I'm frantic!" She all but collapsed into her slipcovered easy chair beside the littered card table. "I'm about ready to die, I'm that upset." Her plump little hand was pressed to her heart as if seeking assurance it was still beating. "I don't want to know anything! It's none of my business. I'm sorry, dear, but you'll have to go. You must understand my position. I'm not at all well, you know. Not well at all. I can't afford to get mixed up in any—unpleasantness."

He sat down on the hassock in front of the fireplace. "Please calm down, Mrs. Hockenberry.

Tell me what this is all about."

"You! It's about *you*. Some woman called. Hours ago. She asked for a Dr. Appleyard." The words burst from her in little spurts of breathlessness, like air being pumped from a bellows.

"Appleyard?"

"Yes! Wrong number, I said. But she wouldn't listen. She just kept talking. She described *you*. Oh, yes, yes. No mistake about it. Said you'd disappeared. Said she was your wife. Oh, I can't remember half what she said. All about the police, and thinking this Dr. Appleyard was—was kidnapped. Or murdered! It was more than I could take in. My head's been in a whirl ever since."

Her eyes lighted everywhere but on his face. Across the room Frenchy lay curled up on the sofa, his watery agate eyes fixed unblinkingly on the tenant.

"Abelard," he said softly. "Not Appleyard."

Her eyes finally met his. "It's true then."

"Yes."

"I knew it must be."

"What else did she say?"

"She wanted to talk to you. Said you'd written her a letter. I didn't know you were still out. I called and thumped."

"Listen, I'm truly sorry," he said, meaning it, pitying her air of utter distraction which seemed, under the circumstan-

ces, excessive even for her. "I didn't expect her to call. I did write to her just to let her know I was all right and why I'd left. It's a long story. I was fed up. I had to get away from everything and everyone. My God, I never thought she'd call the police!"

The color was returning to her withered cheeks. "Well, I certainly would if it were me. My dear, they thought you were *dead*."

"I was," he said dully. "That's why I had to get away." He rose and poured some brandy into a glass and handed it to her. "I'm sorry you were upset, but there's no cause for you to be."

"No cause? She said the police might come here. I'm not at all well, you know that. I can't have the police bothering me. What would the neighbors think?"

"I think it's best I leave. Right away. Tonight."

Instantly, as if the brandy were having an immediately soothing effect, she adopted a more reasonable attitude. "Tonight? No, no that's not necessary, dear. Tomorrow's quite soon enough. I mean, if it's not inconvenient. You do understand, don't you? With my condition and all..."

He left her weeping quietly into her brandy, and in less than half an hour he was in a cab heading for the bus station.

There, sequestered in the restroom, he discarded the mustache and glasses and rinsed the dye out of his hair and eyebrows. He smiled at his image in the glass. It was good to be himself again. A short time later he was standing at the Pan-American check-in counter at Newark Airport.

**M**rs. Hockenberry was spared the disgrace of having officers in uniform tramping through her house; the two men who arrived to question her wore business suits and were politely sympathetic. They showed her a rather fuzzy picture and she said yes it was the man who called himself William Gregson. She gave them the key and let them go up to his apartment, hastily concealing the brandy bottle from which she had taken a fortifying nip when she heard them coming down again.

The man with the valise said, "Plenty of good prints. If they check out, that'll wrap it up."

His companion agreed. "Looks like the wife had the right idea all along. Missing Persons can play with it from now on—if anyone's interested."

"Guy wants to disappear, I guess that's his business."

Mrs. Hockenberry nodded her assent to this professionally unorthodox opinion, feeling

obliged to repeat what she had said before, that never in all her years of dealing with tenants had she met a lovelier gentleman than "nice Mr. Gregson." And then, remembering, she quickly corrected herself. "Or Dr. Appleyard, I suppose I should say."

"Abelard, ma'am," said the younger man with a smile, deciding Mrs. Hockenberry reminded him of his mother.

**F**ar down the beach in front of one of the glistening condos, some sort of hang-gliding competition was in progress. Sitting side by side on the seawall, the couple gazed up at the vivid sails crisscrossing the cloudless blue sky over the Gulf.

"This is what I kept thinking about," he said, draping an arm around her suntanned shoulder. "Moments like this."

She brushed back a lock of sun-gilded hair. "You'll never know how close I came to telling them the truth. I couldn't believe it would ever end like this . . . if it is ended."

"You know it is."

"If only I didn't have to go back."

"Only for a little while."

"I know. It wouldn't do for me to 'disappear' all of a sudden. Everyone understood when I said I had to get away, alone, for a week or two." Her face

clouded. "We mustn't kid ourselves, you know. We'll never be really *certain*, no matter how far we go."

"You mustn't think like that. We can be certain. There's not a chance in a million they'll ever find a trace of Freddy."

**H**e was wrong. The following spring Mrs. Hockenberry, anxious to sell the house in Brooklyn, hired the neighbor boy to clean up the garden. Painters had already been working for weeks refurbishing the apartments. The cats had been given away. Only when she felt particularly well did Mrs. Hockenberry venture to take Frenchy for a walk. Most of the time she merely let him out into the garden.

One afternoon, opening the door to call him in, she saw him excitedly worrying what at first she took to be an old gardening glove, tossing it in the air and then nuzzling it with his jaws.

"Frenchy! Frenchy, what are you doing? You drop that nasty thing and come in the house."

The dog paid no heed and finally she stepped out into the muddy enclosure to investigate. When she saw to her horror what had so captivated the dog's interest, she uttered a little screech of dismay, then quickly glanced up toward the neighboring house. Branches of

the heavily laden horsechestnut tree obscured any view from its windows.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," she kept moaning as she lunged awkwardly to grasp Frenchy by the collar and drag him away from the dreadful object. She didn't dare wait until dark. She knew it had to be done at once. Hastily fetching her gardening gloves and a little spade, her lips screwed up in revulsion, she dug a hole and covered the offensive object with earth.

The processes of decomposition being a mystery to her, she did not wonder that the hand was more than a fleshless skeleton. Nor did she pause to speculate upon what foraging little beast, if it was not Frenchy himself, had disinterred the frightful relic.

After a sleepless night she called the real estate dealer and told him she had changed her mind about selling, leaving him to believe she had decided to remain where she was. Not that she would. In fact, now she could leave whenever she wished. Let the house decay for all she cared; she would be gone from the earth herself long before then.

No, she couldn't risk selling the house. She shuddered to think what might happen to her if anyone should ever dig up that plot of ground and find the rest of Charlie.



# THE ROOKIE'S PREDICAMENT

by John F. McLaughlin

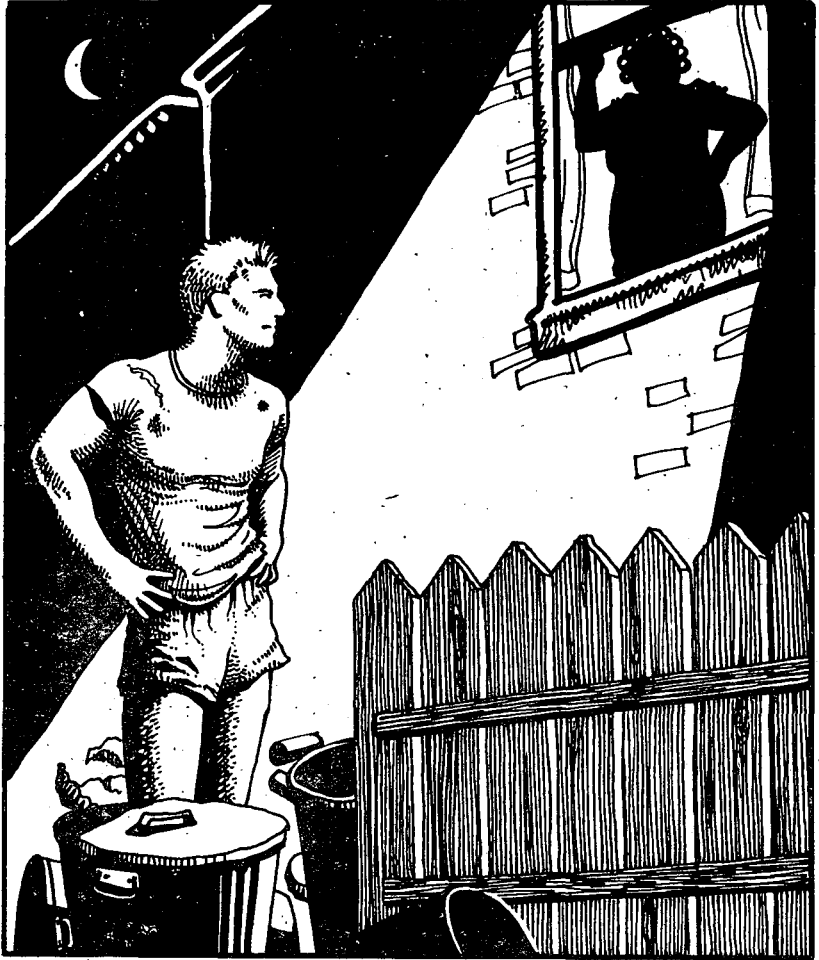


Illustration by Lisa Knouse

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**H**is whole bearing suggested a man who was unabashedly proud of his job, his uniform, and his record. He was large-framed, and on the snowy side of middle age, but he was still youthfully trim and erect. Years of giving commands and making decisions had somewhat hardened his plain features, yet there were the laugh wrinkles on either side of the generous mouth. You felt that Inspector Braun could be a stern taskmaster or a sympathetic ally.

Several times during the year, he managed to guest-lecture at the Academy, and these occasions were keenly appreciated by the cadets. Braun was known to be a career man all the way. His lectures were sure to stress the value of hard, honest leg-work and common sense as opposed, say, to the electronics approach to crime. Besides, his delivery was pungent, and there was always the possibility of some over-zealous cadet's having his ear chewed off.

It was at one of these semi-formal classes that the question of pride—a cop's pride—arose. In his usual terse manner, Braun had made the statement that without pride a police officer was nothing. Immediately, several hands were raised. The lecturer was plainly surprised. Apparently, he had as-

sumed he was merely re-stating an axiom. He called on a man in the front row, an honor student.

"Sir," the cadet said, "just yesterday in Captain Noonan's lecture, we were told that pride, more often than not, is the ruination of a police officer."

"Is that so?" Braun's eyes narrowed.

"Yes, sir. Furthermore, it was emphasized that police officers should exercise more *humility* on the job."

"Humility, eh?" mumbled Braun.

"Right. The captain drummed into us the fact that only by avoiding cockiness and becoming public servants in every sense of the word could we improve our image with the taxpayer. And if you'll pardon me, sir, it was his belief that the Force could certainly stand improvement along that line."

"This Captain Noonan"—there was a scathing inflection in Braun's tone—"is in charge of public relations, isn't he?"

"That's right, sir."

"Well, the next time you attend a lecture of his, ask him if you're training to become a police officer or a press agent. You can quote me as saying that any officer who hesitates in the line of duty, to figure out what the public reaction is going to be, had better turn in his uni-

form for a three-piece suit."

"Sir—are you saying the *hell* with public opinion?"

Braun shot the man a wilting glance. "Don't be childish. You need the good will and cooperation of the public, of course. My point is, you don't need to cultivate them, or invent ways of pleasing them. Do your job honestly, and give it your best effort—you'll receive public support, all right. But let me say this in regard to pride. Show me a *humble* cop, and dammit, I'll show you one who's running scared, or apple-polishing, or both. I'll take the *proud* officer, any time. Nine times out of ten, he's the one who'll fight his way out any situation. He has to—he can't stand defeat or failure.

"In fact, I recall a rather extraordinary case that brings out this very point. It concerns a rookie cop who literally lost everything but his pride. But because of it, he was able to start from scratch, and—but let me tell you exactly what occurred." The class settled back. The inspector's illustrations were proverbially entertaining.

"This particular incident happened—oh, thirty or thirty-five years ago. In those days, walking a beat was a reality, not a politician's promise. The officer involved—we'll call him 'Smith'—was three days' green.

His beat extended from the waterfront over to Eighth Avenue. It was a favorite probationary setup—there was plenty of available help at the hefty end of the beat, while there was very little doing at the other end, because of deserted houses and factories.

"By nature, Smith was one of those men who crave action. In those days of course, a formal education was only a secondary requirement for becoming a police officer. Smith had graduated from public school by the skin of his teeth, and had passed the police exam by less than that. He was not very long on brains, but he did possess other qualities that go a long way toward making a good policeman—he was tough, he was persistent, and above all, he was—well, proud.

"On the third day of his employment—about eight o'clock of a Friday night, to be exact—Smith was down near the river, patrolling deserted streets, and trying doors of abandoned warehouses. Suddenly, he heard a man's call for help. The cry came from an alleyway between two buildings.

"I told you Smith was not too bright, but there was nothing wrong with his physical reflexes. Disregarding all reasonable precaution, he immediately dashed down into the darkness

from where the cries came. In his hurry, and his concern, he neglected to draw a flashlight, pistol, or nightstick. In fact, he forgot everything he had been told about police procedure, and he rushed instinctively into the unknown. Of course, he paid a price for his impulsiveness.

"Incidentally," the inspector peered at the class, relishing the position of stopping at a suspenseful point, "what would you gentlemen say was the worst lot that could befall a rookie—or any other police officer for that matter—outside of death itself?"

There were several speculative answers, ranging from being tossed into the river, to being knocked out and ending up in the gutter. The inspector probed further. "But what is the *ultimate* humiliation any officer can suffer?"

"To have his gun and badge taken away from him?" inquired the bright cadet.

"To lose his whole damn uniform," put in a joker, and the class laughed. The inspector didn't even smile. In fact, he nodded gravely.

"Exactly. And that was the fate young Patrolman Smith rushed into, so injudiciously. He last remembered rushing pell-mell down the blind alley. His next sensations were darkness and an aching head. Once

he became used to the dark void and his own labored breathing, it registered painfully on him that (a) he was lying in a deserted building, (b) he was bound and trussed up like a New Year's pig, and (c) he was clothed only in his underwear. His uniform, badge, gun—even his shoes — had been stripped from him.

"I'm not going to take time to describe in detail the painful hour that followed for that wretched rookie. Let me say only that when his eyes became more accustomed to the dark, he wriggled and squirmed to a part of the floor where he noticed some rotten, broken planking. He positioned himself over one of the jagged edges, and impatiently sawed away at his bound wrists. The gag provided him from crying out as the sharp teeth of the wood cut into his flesh, but he admitted later his eyes were dim with tears.

"He finally solved his problems as far as the ropes were concerned, but trying to rise was like learning all over again. Finally, he did manage to stand upright, trying to plan his next move as best he could with his throbbing head." The inspector shifted his position and looked the class over. "Well, what should his next move be?" Nobody volunteered a reply, and he went on.

"Smith staggered to the front door and made his way to a small porch, inhaling the cool October night air. He felt a little revived, and he took stock of his immediate surroundings. Outside of a few dim lights in a few crummy houses, most of the dwellings seemed to be waiting for the demolition crew.

"A shriek from two passing girls sent him back into the house. He stood leaning against the wall, and slowly his head started to clear. Now a mental conflict began to form. His pride shunned away from informing his superiors of his ridiculous predicament—yet his responsibility as a police officer left him but one course. An armed, disguised criminal was on the loose . . .

"He blundered through the house, went out the back door, and found himself in a pitch-black back yard. 'Gotta get to a phone,' he muttered. As he moved out toward the street, he stumbled into a row of trash cans, knocking several over. Although he escaped injury, the noise sent fresh jangles of pain into his head. In a second he was bathed in a square of yellow light as a shade flew up in a house he hadn't even noticed. A large woman stood in the window. 'Halp! Police! Thieves!' she yelled.

"'Aw, shut up!' Smith

growled, taking off. Through misty eyes he could make out a neon sign about four blocks down the next street. As he approached it, in a slow, panting jog, he was relieved to make out the word 'Tavern.' This was a break—all bars have phones. Soon he found himself outside a typical neighborhood saloon. He pushed open the door and stepped inside.

"The joint was full of the type of characters you could expect in that part of town. In a mill like that one they were used to almost everything, but the appearance of Smith—big, dirty, disheveled, wearing only shirt, shorts, and socks—was too much even for them. At first, they stopped their talking and general carousing, and just stared. Then the heckling started, and the cracks flew thick and fast. Smith made his unsteady way to the bar, presided over by a combination bartender-bouncer.

"'I'm a police officer,' croaked Smith, with as much authority as he could muster, 'and I want to use your phone.' This brought a howl of delight from the patrons at the bar.

"Of course, the bartender played up to the crowd. 'Is that a fact, now? Well, it so happens I'm the commissioner, and I say—outside, bum!' Smith noticed a phone on the wall a

short distance away from the bar, and he made his way toward it. By the time Smith shouldered his way through the crowd, the bartender, fast for his size, stood in front, blocking it. 'Listen, lush. I'm giving you just one chance to leave here in one piece—now, blow!'

"Smith tried to get around him, and the barman grabbed him by the shoulders. Rage, shame, and desperation gave Smith a surprising strength. One lucky punch caused the bartender to fall backwards into the crowd. For a moment no one said or did anything, and Smith moved to the phone. It was a pay phone! Smith wearily faced the mob. By now, they were starting to find their voices and their courage. Cries of 'bum's rush' filled the place, and Smith was literally thrown out of the tavern. He ended up in the gutter outside, but struggled to a sitting position on the curbing.

"Although his head was not too clear, Smith recognized the neighborhood as being near his own beat. He wondered whether the precinct had become suspicious when he failed to call in, earlier. More likely, they merely winked at what they thought was an oversight on the part of a rookie.

"Meanwhile the pedestrians outside the bar paid little attention to him. They were ac-

customed to seeing rolled drunks, and who wanted to get involved? However, someone must have called the station because soon he could hear the welcome sound of an approaching siren.

"He heaved a sigh of relief as he thought of being driven to the station and having his needs attended to. Then he came up with the picture of himself repeating the story of his damn-foolishness to ascending ranks of superior officers, while being exposed to the jibes of the older men. There might even be a newspaper reporter there! He raised himself painfully to his feet and moved himself as fast as he could down the side street from which he had come—

"Behind him, he could hear the cruiser squeal to a halt and a door slam. Then came the pursuit of two pairs of feet, but he had a pretty good start, and the squad-car boys weren't too interested in catching up with some drunken slob, anyway. After one block, he realized he was no longer being followed. He ducked down an alley behind some stores and sat on a crate. Two things he had to do fast—figure the reason for the assault on him, and then plan what he was going to do next."

The inspector paused, raised his eyebrows, and said to the class, "All right. Let's have

some answers." This time the class merely grinned. They had no answers, and the inspector knew it. He looked at them with feigned contempt, then continued.

"Come on, you lousy flat-foot," Smith muttered, "think! Why should anyone knock me cold and steal my stuff? Kids? A psycho? No, they could have wanted a gun, but it was a helluva risky way to get one. And why the whole uniform? Then it hit him.

"The Garden was on the edge of his beat, and at roll call he had been instructed to report there at ten and escort a messenger to a night vault a short distance down the Avenue. There was a fifteen-rounder going on that night, and the take would be extra big. The Garden manager and the messenger would have been notified to expect a new man. Anyone in uniform arriving at ten would certainly be above suspicion.

"He remembered it had been nine twenty-five by the tavern clock—it must be close to twenty to ten, by now. Smith had a scant twenty minutes to make it to the Garden and salvage his reputation. But how far could an underwear-clad man be expected to travel without being nabbed by the police? I'm afraid Captain Noonan never would

have approved of Smith's next action. Very poor public relations.

"The rookie hurried up the alley and on to the shabby street, on the lookout for a lone male pedestrian—his last chance if he was to make the Garden on time. An intersection one block up looked promising. While it wasn't crowded, there were some isolated pedestrians walking along it. Smith hid himself in the doorway of an abandoned store, and waited. Two couples passed; then he heard heavy single footsteps. Seconds later, a swarthy middle-aged man with jaunty hat and flashy topcoat hove into view.

"Every instinct in the young officer recoiled at what he had to do—it was raw pride that allowed him to go through with it. He stepped out of the shadows and tapped the pedestrian on the shoulder. 'I'm a police officer, and I must commandeered your hat and coat in the line of duty. Hand them over, please, and there won't be any trouble—'

"Here the man turned violently and shoved Smith with such power that he very nearly went through the plate glass window of the store. 'You drunken bum! So you want to play games, eh? How's this for a starter?' He swung a blow at the rookie that, had it landed,



might have ended the case then and there.

"Somehow, Smith still had enough agility to dodge away, and he countered with a one-armed strangle hold on his opponent's neck, from behind. With his free hand he unbuttoned the topcoat, and yanked it clear. The victim's hat was already on the pavement. As he relaxed his hold, his opponent, now cured of his desire to fight, started bellowing for the police. Smith, while he was donning the hat and coat, didn't forget the police manual. 'My name's Smith,' he panted, 'Badge Number 1275. You can recover your property at the Thirty-sixth Precinct.' With that, he was gone, leaving his unbelieving prey still shouting for the law.

"Smith directed his stockinged feet in the shortest route to the Garden. Although the spectacle of a wild-looking man in sporty hat and topcoat, but minus trousers and shoes, did cause some comment, no one attempted to stop him, and he made good time. Fortunately, he encountered not a single policeman on his trip downtown.

"When he came in sight of the Garden, his heart sank as he saw the clock outside—five past ten! He looked frantically up and down the avenue, but spotted no one resembling a mes-

senger accompanied by a cop. Too late! Totally discouraged, he went across the street, and leaned against the Garden building near the entrance. His lungs seemed ready to pop, his feet were scraped and bleeding, his head throbbled with pain and exertion. His bruised pride caused him more concern. 'And all for five lousy minutes,' he thought. But then he made for the entrance and the lobby. He had been told to call at ten—but that didn't necessarily mean everything would be ready on the dot. His attacker could still be there—had to be there! When he started to pass through the gate, the uniformed ticket-taker barred his way. 'Sorry, bud. No one gets in without a ticket.'

"'Get out of my way, you fool!' Smith's voice was more like a croak as he shoved the attendant aside. While he was pulling himself upstairs, where an arrow indicated the manager's office, he was conscious of a police whistle somewhere below. The office door was ajar, and just moving out of an inner office were two men—a tall man in uniform and a short, slight man carrying a messenger's bag.

"Without stopping his forward progress, Smith deliberately collided with the tall man, and the two of them crashed to the floor. Atop his victim, Smith

grabbed his gun from the police holster. Reaching up and grasping a fire extinguisher on the wall, he raised himself to an upright position. The imposter remained sitting on the floor, rubbing his head. When Smith heard footsteps tramping up the stairs, he lurched against the door, closing it and hearing the lock click into place.

"The pale manager and the cashier had taken cover behind a desk. The little messenger just stood there, looking positively sick. That was enough to convince Smith that here was the one missing piece in the whole caper."

"'I'm a police officer, and you're both under arrest.' Smith's voice was so husky it could hardly be heard above the tattoo of gun butts on the office door. 'You, for assault, impersonation of an officer, and armed robbery. And you,' he turned to the trembling messenger, 'for being an accessory before, during, and after the fact. You

tipped him off when you got word a new cop would escort you to the bank tonight.'

"'But I didn't want to,' whined the small man. 'I mean, I was afraid that—'

"'Oh, knock it off,' Smith said disgustedly. He nodded to the manager. 'All right. Open up.'

"Through the doorway spilled most of the boys on detail at the Garden. He said to them, 'Smith, Thirty-sixth. How about someone giving me a hand with these two lugs?' His voice was strained, but there was still a lot of self-respect in it."

The inspector smilingly contemplated his rapt audience for a moment. "And that, gentlemen, is what raw pride will do. Any questions?"

The bright boy raised his hand. "I have a question, inspector. How much did this one help you toward your first promotion?"

"Class dismissed," Inspector Braun said.

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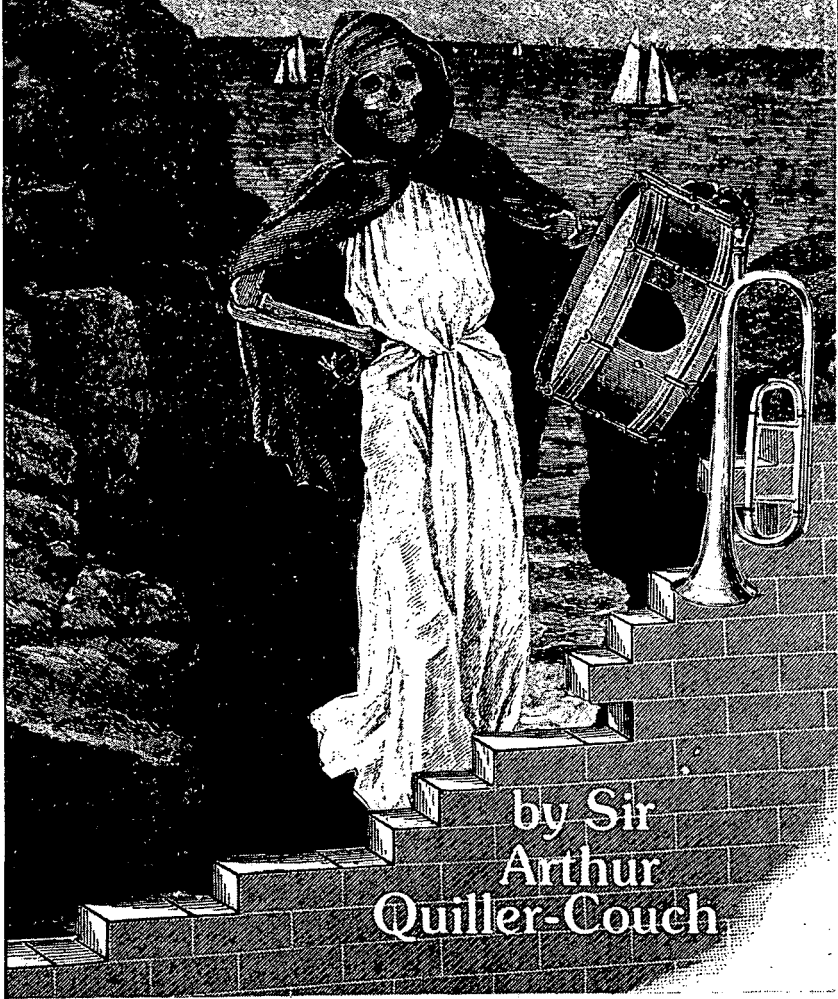
## **SOLUTION TO THE OCTOBER "UNSOLVED":**

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Brad is the murderer.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

# The Roll-Call Of The Reef



by Sir  
Arthur  
Quiller-Couch

*Illustration by Marc Yankus*

133

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“**Y**es, sir,” said my host the quarryman, reaching down the relics from their hook in the wall over the chimney-piece; “they’ve hung there all my time, and most of my father’s. The women won’t touch ’em; they’re afraid of the story. So here they’ll dangle, and gather dust and smoke, till another tenant comes and tosses ’em out o’ doors for rubbish. Whew! ’tis coarse weather.”

He went to the door, opened it, and stood studying the gale that beat upon his cottage front, straight from the Manacle Reef. The rain drove past him into the kitchen, aslant like threads of gold silk in the shine of the wreckwood fire. Meanwhile by the same firelight I examined the relics on my knee. The metal of each was tarnished out of knowledge. But the trumpet was evidently an old cavalry trumpet, and the threads of its parti-colored sling, though frayed and dusty, still hung together. Around the side-drum, beneath its cracked brown varnish, I could hardly trace a royal coat of arms, and a legend running—*Per Mare per Terram*—the motto of the Marines. Its parchment, though colored and scented with wood smoke, was limp and mildewed; and I began to tighten up the straps—under which the drumsticks had been loosely thrust—with the idle purpose of trying if some music might be got out of the old drum yet.

But as I turned it on my knee, I found the drum attached to the trumpet-sling by a curious barrel-shaped padlock, and paused to examine this. The body of the lock was composed of half a dozen brass rings, set accurately edge to edge; and, rubbing the brass with my thumb, I saw that each of the six had a series of letters engraved around it.

I knew the trick of it, I thought. Here was one of those word padlocks, once so common; only to be opened by getting the rings to spell a certain word, which the dealer confides to you.

My host shut and barred the door, and came back to the hearth.

“’Twas just such a wind—east by south—that brought in what you’ve got between your hands. Back in the year ’09 it was; my father has told me the tale a score o’ times. You’re twisting round the rings, I see. But you’ll never guess the word. Parson Kendall, he made the word, and locked down a couple o’ ghosts in their graves with it; and when his time came, he went to his own grave and took the word with him.”

“Whose ghosts, Matthew?”

“You want the story, I see, sir. My father could tell it better than

I can. He was a young man in the year '09, unmarried at the time, and living in this very cottage just as I be. That's how he came to get mixed up with the tale."

He took a chair, lit a short pipe, and unfolded the story in a low musing voice, with his eyes fixed on the dancing violet flames.

"Yes, he'd ha' been about thirty year old in January, of the year '09. The storm got up in the night o' the twenty-first o' that month. My father was dressed and out long before daylight; he never was one to 'bide in bed, let be that the gale by this time was pretty near lifting the thatch over his head. Besides which, he'd fenced a small 'taty-patch that winter, down by Lowland Point, and he wanted to see if it stood the night's work. He took the path across Gunner's Meadow—where they buried most of the bodies afterwards. The wind was right in his teeth at the time, and once on the way (he's told me this often) a great strip of oar-weed came flying through the darkness and fetched him a slap on the cheek like a cold hand. But he made shift pretty well till he got to Lowland, and then had to drop upon his hands and knees and crawl, digging his fingers every now and then into the shingle to hold on, for he declared to me that the stones, some of them as big as a man's head, kept rolling and driving past till it seemed the whole foreshore was moving westward under him. The fence was gone, of course; not a stick left to show where it stood; so that, when first he came to the place, he thought he must have missed his bearings. My father, sir, was a very religious man; and if he reckoned the end of the world was at hand—there in the great wind and night, among the moving stones—you may believe he was certain of it when he heard a gun fired, and, with the same, saw a flame shoot up out of the darkness to windward, making a sudden fierce light in all the place about. All he could find to think or say was, 'The Second Coming—The Second Coming! The Bridegroom cometh, and the wicked He will toss like a ball into a large country!' and being already upon his knees, he just bowed his head and 'bided, saying this over and over.

"But by'm-by, between two squalls, he made bold to lift his head and look, and then by the light—a bluish color 'twas—he saw all the coast clear away to Manacle Point, and off-the Manacles, in the thick of the weather, a sloop-of-war with top gallants housed, driving stern foremost towards the reef. It was she, of course, that was burning the flare. My father could see the white streak and the ports of her quite plain as she rose to it, a little outside the

breakers, and he guessed easy enough that her captain had just managed to wear ship, and was trying to force her nose to the sea with the help of her small bower anchor and the scrap or two of canvas that hadn't yet been blown out of her. But while he looked, she fell off, giving her broadside to it foot by foot, and drifting back on the breakers around Carn dû and the Varses. The rocks lie so thick thereabouts, that 'twas a toss-up which she struck first; at any rate, my father couldn't tell at the time, for just then the flare died down and went out.

"Well, sir, he turned then in the dark and started back for Coverack to cry the dismal tidings—though well knowing ship and crew to be past any hope; and as he turned, the wind lifted him and tossed him forward 'like a ball,' as he'd been saying, and homeward along the foreshore. As you know, 'tis ugly work, even by daylight, picking your way among the stones there, and my father was prettily knocked about at first in the dark. But by this 'twas nearer seven than six o'clock, and the day spreading. By the time he reached North Corner, a man could see to read print; hows'ever, he looked neither out to sea nor towards Coverack, but headed straight for the first cottage—the same that stands above North Corner today. A man named Billy Ede lived there then, and when my father burst into the kitchen bawling; 'Wreck! wreck!' he saw Billy Ede's wife, Ann, standing there in her clogs, with a shawl over her head, and her clothes wringing wet.

"'Save the chap!' says Billy Ede's wife, Ann. 'What d' 'ee mean by crying stale fish at that rate?' 'But 'tis, a wreck, I tell 'ee. I've a-zeed 'n!' 'Why, so 'tis,' says she, 'and I've a-zeed 'n, too; and so has everyone with an eye in his head.'

"And with that she pointed straight over my father's shoulder, and he turned; and there, close under Dolor Point, at the end of Coverack town, he saw another wreck washing, and the point black with people, like emmets, running to and fro in the morning light. While he stood staring at her, he heard a trumpet sounded on board, the notes coming in little jerks, like a bird rising against the wind; but faintly, of course, because of the distance and the gale blowing—though this had dropped a little.

"'She's a transport,' said Billy Ede's wife, Ann, 'and full of horse soldiers, fine long men. When she struck they must ha' pitched the hosses over first to lighten the ship, for a score of dead hosses had washed in afore I left, half an hour back. An' three or four soldiers, too—fine long corpses in white breeches and jackets of blue and



gold. I held the lantern to one. Such a straight young man.'

"My father asked her about the trumpeting.

"That's the queerest bit of all. She was burnin' a light when me an' my man joined the crowd down there. All her masts had gone; whether they carried away, or were cut away to ease her, I don't rightly know. Anyway, there she lay 'pon the rocks with her decks bare. Her keelson was broke under her and her bottom sagged and stove, and she had just settled down like a sitting hen—just the leastest list to starboard; but a man could stand there easy. They had rigged up ropes across her, from bulwark to bulwark, an' beside these the men were mustered, holding on like grim death whenever the sea made a clean breach over them, an' standing up like heroes as soon as it passed. The captain an' the officers were clinging to the rail of the quarterdeck, all in their golden uniforms, waiting for the end as if 'twas King George they expected. There was no way to help; for she lay right beyond cast of line, though our folk tried it fifty times. And besides them clung a trumpeter, a whacking big man, an' between the heavy seas he would lift his trumpet with one hand, and blow a call; and every time he blew, the men gave a cheer. There (she says)—hark 'ee now—there he goes agen! But you won't hear no cheering any more, for few are left to cheer, and their voices weak. Bitter cold the wind is, and I reckon it numbs their grip o' the ropes, for they were dropping off fast with every sea when my man sent me home to get his breakfast. Another wreck, you say? Well, there's no hope for the tender dears, if 'tis the Manacles. You'd better run down and help yonder; though 'tis little help that any man can give. Not one came in alive while I was there. The tide's flowin', an' she won't hold together another hour, they say.'

"Well, sure enough, the end was coming fast when my father got down to the point. Six men had been cast up alive, or just breathing—a seaman and five troopers. The seaman was the only that had breath to speak; and while they were carrying him into the town, the word went round that the ship's name was the *Despatch*, transport, homeward bound from Corunna, with a detachment of the 7th Hussars, that had been fighting out there with Sir John Moore. The seas had rolled her farther over by this time, and given her decks a pretty sharp list; but a dozen men still held on, seven by the ropes near the ship's waist, a couple near the break of the poop, and three on the quarterdeck. Of these three my father made out one to be the skipper; close by him clung an officer in



full regimentals—his name, they heard after, was Captain Duncanfield; and last came the tall trumpeter; and if you'll believe me, the fellow was making shift there, at the very last, to blow 'God Save the King.' What's more, he got to 'Send us victorious' before an extra big sea came bursting across and washed them off the deck—every man but one of the pair beneath the poop—and *he* dropped his hold before the next wave; being stunned, I reckon. The others went out of sight at once, but the trumpeter—being, as I said, a powerful man as well as a tough swimmer—rose like a duck, rode out a couple of breakers, and came in on the crest of the third. The folks looked to see him broke like an egg at their feet; but when the smother cleared, there he was, lying face downward on a ledge below them; and one of the men that happened to have a rope round him—I forget the fellow's name, if I ever heard it—jumped down and grabbed him by the ankle as he began to slip back. Before the next big sea, the pair were hauled high enough to be out of harm, and another heave brought them up to grass. Quick work; but master trumpeter wasn't quite dead; nothing worse than a cracked head and three staved ribs. In twenty minutes or so they had him in bed, with the doctor to tend him."

"Now was the time—nothing being left alive upon the transport—for my father to tell of the sloop he'd seen driving upon the Manacles. And when he got a hearing, though the most were set upon salvage, and believed a wreck in the hand, so to say, to be worth half a dozen they couldn't see, a good few volunteered to start off with him and have a look. They crossed Lowland Point; no ship to be seen on the Manacles, nor anywhere upon the sea. One or two was for calling my father a liar. 'Wait till we come to Dean Point,' said he. Sure enough, on the far side of Dean Point, they found the sloop's mainmast washing about with half a dozen men lashed to it—men in red jackets—every mother's son drowned and staring; and a little farther on, just under the Dean, three or four bodies cast up on the shore, one of them a small drummer-boy, side-drum and all; and nearby, part of a ship's gig, with 'H.M.S. *Primrose*' cut on the stern board. From this point on, the shore was littered with wreckage and dead bodies—the most of them Marines in uniform; and in Godrevy Cove, in particular, a heap of furniture from the captain's cabin, and amongst it a water-tight box, not much damaged, and full of papers, by which, when it came to be examined next day, the wreck was easily made out to be the *Prim-*

rose, of eighteen guns, outward bound from Portsmouth, with a fleet of transports for the Spanish War—thirty sail, I've heard, but I've never heard what became of them. Being handled by merchant skippers, no doubt they rode out the gale and reached the Tagus safe and sound. Not but what the captain of the *Primrose* (Mein was his name) did quite right to try and club-haul his vessel when he found himself under the land: only he never ought to have got there if he took proper soundings. But it's easy talking.

"The *Primrose*, sir, was a handsome vessel—for her size, one of the handsomest in the king's service—and newly fitted out at Plymouth Dock. So the boys had brave pickings from her in the way of brass work, ship's instruments, and the like, let alone some barrels of stores not much spoiled. They loaded themselves with as much as they could carry, and started for home, meaning to make a second journey before the preventive men got wind of their doings and came to spoil the fun. But as my father was passing back under the Dean, he happened to take a look over his shoulder at the bodies there. 'Hullo,' says he, and dropped his gear, 'I do believe there's a leg moving!' And, running fore, he stooped over the small drummer-boy that I told you about. The poor little chap was lying there, with his face a mass of bruises and his eyes closed: but he had shifted one leg an inch or two, and was still breathing. So my father pulled out a knife and cut him free from his drum—that was lashed on to him with a double turn of Manila rope—and took him up and carried him along here, to this very room that we're sitting in. He lost a good deal by this, for when he went back to fetch his bundle the preventive men had got hold of it, and were thick as thieves along the foreshore; so that 'twas only by paying one or two to look the other way that he picked up anything worth carrying off: which you'll allow to be hard seeing that he was the first man to give news of the wreck.

"Well, the inquiry was held, of course, and my father gave evidence; and for the rest they had to trust to the sloop's papers, for not a soul was saved besides the drummer-boy, and he was raving in a fever, brought on by the cold and the fright. And the seamen and the five troopers gave evidence about the loss of the *Despatch*. The tall trumpeter, too, whose ribs were healing, came forward and kissed the Book; but somehow his head had been hurt in coming ashore; and he talked foolish-like, and 'twas easy seen he would never be a proper man again. The others were taken up to Plymouth, and so went their ways; but the trumpeter stayed on in Cove-

rack; and King George, finding he was fit for nothing, sent him down a trifle of a pension after a while—enough to keep him in board and lodging, with a bit of tobacco over.

"Now the first time that this man—William Tallifer, he called himself—met with the drummer-boy, was about a fortnight after the little chap had bettered enough to be allowed a short walk out of doors, which he took, if you please, in full regimentals. There never was a soldier so proud of his dress. His own suit had shrunk a brave bit with the salt water; but into ordinary frock an' corduroys he declared he would not get—not if he had to go naked the rest of his life; so my father, being a good-natured man and handy with the needle, turned to and repaired damages with a piece or two of scarlet cloth cut from the jacket of one of the drowned Marines. Well, the poor little chap chanced to be standing, in this rig-out, down by the gate of Gunner's Meadow, where they had buried two score and over of his comrades. The morning was a fine one, early in March month; and along came the cracked trumpeter, likewise taking a stroll.

"'Hullo!' says he; 'good mornin'! And what might you be doin' here?'

"'I was a-wishin',' says the boy, 'I had a pair o' drum sticks. Our lads were buried yonder without so much as a drum tapped or a musket fired; and that's not Christian burial for British soldiers.'

"'Phut!' says the trumpeter, and spat on the ground; 'a parcel of Marines!'

"The boy eyed him a second or so, and answered up: 'If I'd a tab of turf handy, I'd bung it at your mouth, you greasy cavalry man, and learn you to speak respectful of your betters. The Marines are the handiest body of men in the service.'

"The trumpeter looked down on him from the height of six foot two, and asked: 'Did they die well?'

"'They died very well. There was a lot of running to and fro at first, and some of the men began to cry, and a few to strip off their clothes. But when the ship fell off for the last time, Captain Mein turned and said something to Major Griffiths, the commanding officer on board, and the major called out to me to beat to quarters. It might have been for a wedding, he sang it out so cheerful. We'd had word already that 'twas to be parade order, and the men fell in as trim and decent as if they were going to church. One or two even tried to shave at the last moment. The major wore his medals. One of the seamen, seeing I had hard work to keep the drum

steady—the sling being a bit loose for me and the wind what you remember—lashed it tight with a piece of rope; and that saved my life afterwards, a drum being as good as a cork until 'tis stove. I kept beating away until every man was on deck; and then the major formed them up and told them to die like British soldiers, and the chaplain read a prayer or two—the boys standin' all the while like rocks, each man's courage keeping up the other's. The chaplain was in the middle of a prayer when she struck. In ten minutes she was gone. That was how they died, cavalryman.'

"'And that was very well done, drummer of the Marines. What's your name?'

"'John Christian.'

"'Mine is William George Tallifer, trumpeter, of the 7th Light Dragoons—the Queen's Own. I played "God Save the King" while our men were drowning. Captain Duncanfield told me to sound a call or two, to put them in heart; but that matter of "God Save the King" was a notion of my own. I won't say anything to hurt the feelings of a Marine, even if he's not much over five foot tall; but the Queen's Own Hussars is a tearin' fine regiment. As between horse and foot, 'tis a question o' which gets the chance. All the way from Sahagun to Corunna 'twas we that took and gave the knocks—at Mayorga and Rueda, and Bennyventy.' (The reason, sir, I can speak the names so pat is that my father learnt 'em by heart afterwards from the trumpeter, who was always talking about Mayorga and Rueda and Bennyventy.) 'We made the rear guard, under General Paget, and drove the French every time; and all the infantry did was to sit about in wine shops till we whipped 'em out, an' steal an' straggle an' play the tom-fool in general. And when it came to a stand-up fight at Corunna, 'twas the horse, or the best part of it, that had to stay seasick aboard the transports, an' watch the infantry in the thick o' the caper. Very well they behaved, too: 'specially the 4th Regiment, and the 42nd Highlanders an' the Dirty Half Hundred. Oh, aye; they're decent regiments, all three. But the Queen's Own Hussars is a tearin' fine regiment. So you played on your drum when the ship was goin' down? Drummer John Christian, I'll have to get you a new pair o' drumsticks for that.'

"Well, sir, it appears that the very next day the trumpeter marched into Helston, and got a carpenter there to turn him a pair of box wood drumsticks for the boy. And this was the beginning of one of the most curious friendships you ever heard tell of. Noth-

ing delighted the pair more than to borrow a boat off my father and pull out to the rocks where the *Primrose* and the *Despatch* had struck and sunk; and on still days 'twas pretty to hear them out there off the Manacles, the drummer playing his tattoo—for they always took their music with them—and the trumpeter practicing calls, and making his trumpet speak like an angel. But if the weather turned roughish, they'd be walking together and talking; leastwise, the youngster listened while the other discoursed about Sir John's campaign in Spain and Portugal, telling how each little skirmish befell; and of Sir John himself, and General Baird and General Paget and Colonel Vivian, his own commanding officer, and what kind of men they were; and of the last bloody stand-up at Corunna, and so forth, as if neither could have enough.

"But all this had to come to an end in the later summer; for the boy, John Christian, being now well and strong again, must go up to Plymouth to report himself. 'Twas his own wish—for I believe King George had forgotten all about him), but his friend wouldn't hold him back. As for the trumpeter, my father had made an arrangement to take him on as a lodger as soon as the boy left; and on the morning fixed for the start, he was up at the door here by five o'clock, with his trumpet slung by his side, and all the rest of his kit in a small valise. A Monday morning it was, and after breakfast he had fixed to walk with the boy some way on the road towards Helston, where the coach started. My father left them at breakfast together, and went out to meat the pig, and do a few odd morning jobs of that sort. When he came back, the boy was still at table, and the trumpeter standing here by the chimney-place with the drum and trumpet in his hands, hitched together just as they be at this moment.

"'Look at this,' he says to my father, showing him the lock; 'I picked it up off a starving brass worker in Lisbon, and it is not one of your common locks that one word of six letters will open at any time. There's *janius* in this lock; for you've only to make the rings spell any six-letter word you please, and snap down the lock upon that, and never a soul can open it—not the maker, even—until somebody comes along that knows the word you snapped it on. Now, Johnny here's goin', and he leaves his drum behind him; for, though he can make pretty music on it, the parchment sags in wet weather, by reason of the sea water getting at it; an' if he carries it to Plymouth, they'll only condemn it and give him another. And, as for me, I shan't have the heart to put lip to the trumpet any

more when Johnny's gone. So we've chosen a word together, and locked 'em together upon that; and, by your leave, I'll hang 'em here together on the hook over your fireplace. Maybe Johnny'll come back; maybe not. Maybe, if he comes, I'll be dead an' gone, an' he'll take 'em apart an' try their music for old sake's sake. But if he never comes, nobody can separate 'em; for nobody beside knows the word. And if you marry and have sons, you can tell 'em that here are tied together the souls of Johnny Christian, drummer of the Marines, and William George Tallifer, once trumpeter of the Queen's Own Hussars. Amen.'

"With that he hung the two instruments 'pon the hook there; and the boy stood up and thanked my father and shook hands; and the pair went forth of the door, towards Helston.

"Somewhere on the road they took leave of one another; but nobody saw the parting, nor heard what was said between them. About three in the afternoon the trumpeter came walking back over the hill; and by the time my father came home from the fishing, the cottage was tidied up and the tea ready, and the whole place shining like a new pin. From that time for five years he lodged here with my father, looking after the house and tilling the garden; and all the while he was steadily failing, the hurt in his head spreading, in a manner, to his limbs. My father watched the feebleness growing on him, but said nothing. And from first to last neither spake a word about the drummer, John Christian; nor did any letter reach them, nor word of his doings.

"The rest of the tale you're free to believe, sir, or not, as you please. It stands upon my father's words, and he always declared he was ready to kiss the Book upon it before judge and jury. He said, too, that he never had the wit to make up such a yarn; and he defied anyone to explain about the lock, in particular, by any other tale. But you shall judge for yourself.

"My father said that about three o'clock in the morning, April 14th of the year '14, he and William Tallifer were sitting here, just as you and I, sir, are sitting now. My father had put on his clothes a few minutes before, and was mending his spiller by the light of the horn lantern, meaning to set off before daylight to haul the trammel. The trumpeter hadn't been to bed at all. Towards the last he mostly spent his nights (and his days, too) dozing in the elbow-chair where you sit at this minute. He was dozing then (my father said), with his chin dropped forward on his chest, when a knock sounded upon the door, and the door opened, and in walked an

upright young man in scarlet regimentals.

"He had grown a brave bit, and his face was the color of wood ashes; but it was the drummer, John Christian. Only his uniform was different from the one he used to wear, and the figures '38' shone in brass upon his collar.

"The drummer walked past my father as if he never saw him, and stood by the elbow-chair and said:

" 'Trumpeter, trumpeter, are you one with me?'

"And the trumpeter just lifted the lids of his eyes, and answered, 'How should I not be one with you, drummer Johnny—Johnny boy? The men are patient. Till you come, I count; while you march, I mark time; until the discharge comes.'

" 'The discharge has come tonight,' said the drummer, 'and the word is Corunna no longer'; and stepping to the chimney-place, he unhooked the drum and trumpet, and began to twist the brass rings of the lock, spelling the word aloud, so—C-O-R-U-N-A. When he had fixed the last letter, the padlock opened in his hand.

" 'Did you know, trumpeter, that when I came to Plymouth they put me into a line regiment?'

" 'The 38th is a good regiment,' answered the old Hussar, still in his dull voice. 'I went back with them from Sahagun to Corunna. At Corunna they stood in General Fraser's division, on the right. They behaved well.'

" 'But I'd fain see the Marines again,' says the drummer, handing him the trumpet; 'and you—you shall call once more for the Queen's Own. Matthew,' he says, suddenly, turning on my father—and when he turned, my father saw for the first time that his scarlet jacket had a round hole by the breast bone, and that the blood was welling there—'Matthew, we shall want your boat.'

"Then my father rose on his legs like a man in a dream, while they two slung on, the one his drum, and t'other his trumpet. He took the lantern, and went quaking before them down to the shore, and they breathed heavily behind him; and they stepped into his boat, and my father pushed off.

" 'Row you first for Dolor Point,' says the drummer. So my father rowed them out past the white houses of Coverack to Dolor Point, and there, at a word, lay on his oars. And the trumpeter, William Tallifer, put his trumpet to his mouth and sounded the Revelly. The music of it was like rivers running.

" 'They will follow,' said the drummer. 'Matthew, pull you now for the Manacles.'



"So my father pulled for the Manacles, and came to an easy close outside Carn dû. And the drummer took his sticks and beat a tattoo, there by the edge of the reef; and the music of it was like a rolling chariot.

" 'That will do,' says he, breaking off; 'they will follow. Pull now for the shore under Gunner's Meadow.'

"Then my father pulled for the shore, and ran his boat in under Gunner's Meadow. And they stepped out, all three, and walked up to the meadow. By the gate the drummer halted and began his tattoo again, looking out towards the darkness over the sea.

"And while the drum beat, and my father held his breath, there came up out of the sea and the darkness a troop of many men, horse and foot, and formed up among the graves; and others rose out of the graves and formed up—drowned Marines with bleached faces, and pale Hussars riding their horses, all lean and shadowy. There was no clatter of hoofs or accoutrements, my father said, but a soft sound all the while, like the beating of a bird's wing, and a black shadow lying like a pool about the feet of all. The drummer stood upon a little knoll just inside the gate, and beside him the tall trumpeter, with hand on hip, watching them gather; and behind them both my father, clinging to the gate. When no more came, the drummer stopped playing, and said, 'Call the roll.'

"Then the trumpeter stepped towards the end man of the rank and called, 'Troop-Sergeant-Major Thomas Irons!' and the man in a thin voice answered, 'Here!'

" 'Troop-Sergeant-Major Thomas Irons, how is it with you?'

"The man answered, 'How should it be with me? When I was young, I betrayed a girl; and when I was grown, I betrayed a friend, and for these things I must pay. But I died as a man ought. God save the king!'

"The trumpeter called to the next man, 'Trooper Henry Buckingham!' and the next man answered, 'Here!'

" 'Trooper Henry Buckingham, how is it with you?'

" 'How should it be with me? I was a drunkard, and I stole, and in Lugo, in a wine shop, I knifed a man. But I died as a man should. God save the king!'

"So the trumpeter went down the line; and when he had finished, the drummer took it up, hailing the dead Marines in their order. Each man answered to his name, and each man ended with 'God save the king!' When all were hailed, the drummer stepped back to his mound, and called:

"'It is well. You are content, and we are content to join you. Wait yet a little while.'

"With this he turned and ordered my father to pick up the lantern, and lead the way back. As my father picked it up, he heard the ranks of dead men cheer and call, 'God save the king!' all together, and saw them waver and fade back into the dark, like a breath fading off a pane.

"But when they came back here to the kitchen, and my father set the lantern down, it seemed they'd both forgot about him. For the drummer turned in the lantern-light—and my father could see the blood still welling out of the hole in his breast—and took the trumpet-sling from around the other's neck, and locked drum and trumpet together again, choosing the letters on the lock very carefully. While he did this he said:

"'The word is no more Corunna, but Bayonne. As you left out an "n" in Corunna, so must I leave out an "n" in Bayonne.' And before snapping the padlock, he spelt out the word slowly—'B-A-Y-O-N-E.' After that, he used no more speech; but turned and hung the two instruments back on the hook; and then took the trumpeter by the arm; and the pair walked out into the darkness, glancing neither to right nor left.

"My father was on the point of following, when he heard a sort of sigh behind him; and there, sitting in the elbow-chair, was the very trumpeter he had just seen walk out by the door! If my father's heart jumped before, you may believe it jumped quicker now. But after a bit, he went up to the man asleep in the chair, and put a hand upon him. It was the trumpeter in flesh and blood that he touched; but though the flesh was warm, the trumpeter was dead.

"Well, sir, they buried him three days after; and at first my father was minded to say nothing about his dream (as he thought it). But the day after the funeral, he met Parson Kendall coming from Helston market: and the parson called out: 'Have 'ee heard the news the coach brought down this mornin'?' 'What news?' says my father. 'Why, that peace is agreed upon.' 'None too soon,' says my father. 'Not soon enough for our poor lads at Bayonne,' the parson answered. 'Bayonne!' cries my father, with a jump. 'Why, yes'; and the parson told him all about a great sally the French had made on the night of April 13th. 'Do you happen to know if the 38th Regiment was engaged?' my father asked. 'Come, now,' said Parson Kendall, 'I didn't know you was so well up in the campaign. But, as it happens, I *do* know that the 38th was engaged,

for 'twas they that held a cottage and stopped the French advance.'

"Still my father held his tongue; and when, a week later, he walked into Helston and bought a *Mercury* off the Sherborne rider, and got the landlord of the Angel to spell out the list of killed and wounded, sure enough, there among the killed was Drummer John Christian, of the 38th Foot.

"After this, there was nothing for a religious man but to make a clean breast. So my father went up to Parson Kendall and told the whole story. The parson listened, and put a question or two, and then asked:

"Have you tried to open the lock since that night?"

"I han't dared to touch it," says my father.

"Then come along and try." When the parson came to the cottage here, he took the things off the hood and tried the lock. 'Did he say "Bayonne"? The word has seven letters.'

"Not if you spell it with one "n" as *he* did," says my father.

"The parson spelt it out—B-A-Y-O-N-E. 'Whew!' says he, for the lock had fallen open in his hand.

"He stood considering it a moment, and then he says, 'I tell you what. I shouldn't blab this all round the parish, if I was you. You won't get no credit for truth-telling, and a miracle's wasted on a set of fools. But if you like, I'll shut down the lock again upon a holy word that no one but me shall know, and neither drummer nor trumpeter, dead or alive, shall frighten the secret out of me.'

"I wish to gracious you would, parson," said my father.

"The parson chose the holy word there and then, and shut the lock back upon it, and hung the drum and trumpet back in their place. He is gone long since, taking the word with him. And till the lock is broken by force, nobody will ever separate those twain."

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# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



Bill Grimes

MARTHA GRIMES

**A** cceptance of the improbable is, in certain respects, the easiest thing in the world for mystery readers. I suspect that most of us actually delight in it; at the very least, we are not put off one jot by its appearance. For example, how *probable* is it when our favorite fictional detectives encounter a locked-room puzzler? And yet, to our immense satisfaction, they often do—better yet, they always solve them. We thrive on the tales of their exploits, their cunning deductions, their brilliant solutions, rarely questioning the likelihood of their dilemmas in the first place. Some questions are just better left unasked.

Martha Grimes, in her four Richard Jury mysteries, adds a

new dimension to the improbable. Jury, a Scotland Yard superintendent, and his self-appointed sidekick Melrose Plant go tripping around the English countryside—from pub to pub, if the titles can be used as clues—to solve devilishly clever mysteries. Along the way, we're treated to a picture of England just as we've always imagined it: charming villages, local characters, cosy pubs, and crimes right out of the Victorian age, crimes with color and passion and secrecy, crimes with *class*. How deliciously improbable it is then, that these novels, so accurately capturing the speech and scenery and spirit of Jolly Old England, are penned by an American? And just when British CID procedurals are

dealing with the very real, contemporary problems of unemployment, drug abuse, film piracy, and the like, along comes Grimes to reprise rural England in all its murder-in-the-vicarage splendor. Perhaps it's not probable—but then, who cares? It's all jolly good fun.

The four books, each named after the pub central to its story, have titles as whimsical as the people who frequent the places. *The Man with a Load of Mischief* was followed by *The Old Fox Deceiv'd* in 1982. Then came *The Anodyne Necklace*, and in April of this year, *The Dirty Duck*. A fifth Jury novel is promised for this fall.

Let me introduce the heroes to you. Richard Jury, who was promoted to superintendent in the third novel, is a quiet man who takes his job seriously. He lives alone in a humble London flat, showing great kindness to his poor neighbor, a woman terrified of violence who's a self-imposed prisoner in her own basement apartment. Jury is the perfect foil to his amateur sidekick—and newfound friend—Melrose Plant. Plant is a bachelor, too; in every other way, he and Jury are as opposite as yin and yang. For one thing, Plant is a millionaire. A dilettante, and bored, he nosed in on Jury's first case—in his own neighborhood—and discovered that crime-solving with

Jury was the most fun he'd had in years. Although he was born with a title, he's long ago surrendered it, which gives his pushy aunt-by-marriage even more cause to think him "eccentric." (She's American, one of those types you'd describe as an "impossible woman"—if you were British, at least.) Plant is always trying to escape from her, and so his adventures with Jury have the added appeal of getting him away from Aunt Agatha.

Jury and Plant make a smashing team. Jury goes about his job quietly, with common sense, caution, and a great deal of experience. Plant adds much with his own flair, wit, and imagination, not to mention his unbridled enthusiasm. The two men understand one another without ever discussing their relationship, and their friendship—which is perfectly plausible—adds a touching note to the tales.

The plots are full of suspense, adventure, and mystery. There are some hair-raising scenes, and some desperate moments; there are also some shocking crimes, though these add piquancy rather than gratuitous gore. Characters called Pluck, Twig, and Honeybun admirably live up to their names.

As improbable as it may seem, Martha Grimes has recreated the villages and pubs of rural

England more graphically than her British colleagues. To American mystery readers, these books are high teas, feasts for the Anglophile. Perhaps this is no more than the geography of Grimes's mind, the landscape of her imagination. But imagi-

nation—unlike strict probability—is a most desirable ingredient in a recipe for murder-mysteries.

(Little, Brown and Company publishes Martha Grimes' novels in hard cover.)

## MYSTERY REVIEWS

**Death of an Englishman** occurs in Florence just before the Christmas holidays. Because the death is a murder, two Scotland Yard men are dispatched from London. They join forces with a stern Italian captain and his overzealous recruit, but it is the stolid local marshal—between bouts with the flu and his departure for the holidays in the south, with his family—who solves the crime. Author Magdalen Nabb shows a keen eye for the peccadilloes of her countrymen and their Italian counterparts, and gives a sharply-detailed portrait of the small, sad details of the common man's daily life. Not a thriller, this is a solid character study with an emotional impact. (Penguin Books, \$2.95, 172 pp.)

Jane Langton, profiled in this column, has devised another mystery for the endearing Homer Kelly to solve. Like the others, **Emily Dickinson Is Dead** is set in New England—Amherst, in this case—and is filled with wonderfully improbable "Yankees." The catalyst for violence is unlikely: the centennial observance of Emily Dickinson's death in 1886. But, after all, perhaps it's appropriate, for the symposium participants are all affected by their various searches for love: romance, sex, even academic acceptance. There's a controversial photo of what "might be" Dickinson as she looked in 1860 (and it's printed in the book, along with Langton's charming sketches); there's a sad tale of a schoolgirl crush that swells to obsession; and there's even a gaggle of Dickinson admirers, scholars, and just plain "nuts" who add an edge of zaniness to the somber business of murder. I can't say more. Just read . . . and enjoy. (St. Martin's Press/A Joan Kahn Book, \$13.95, 247 pp.)

**Keystone** is the newest offering by yet another of our profiled authors, Peter Lovesey. This one doesn't feature Sergeant Cribb, though. Lovesey has turned his researcher's eye and his lively wit to another era entirely: the early days of Hollywood and the Mack Sennett film studio. The hero is Warwick Easton, a British vaudeville "straight man," whom Sennett dubs "Keystone" when the

director hires the actor as the newest of the Keystone Kops. There are blackmail, bigamy, and murder in the scenario as Keystone tries to find his kidnapped girlfriend (the ingénue, of course!). There's also lots of great background stuff on moviemaking in the days of the "silents," glimpses of Sennett, Mabel Norman, Fatty Arbuckle and the like, and some death-defying escape and chase scenes that could compete with any of Sennett's own Saturday-matinee serials. This is great fun. (Pantheon, \$12.95, 256 pp.)

Harry Stoner is a Cincinnati private eye, the creation of author Jonathan Valin, and a star in his own series of mysteries. The latest is **Natural Causes** (Avon Books, \$2.95, 295 pp.), and it, too, takes readers to Hollywood. This is Tinsel Town as it is today, though, and although some of it may seem familiar, Valin has chosen to explore the less-known ground of daytime TV—otherwise known as the "soaps." The head writer for one of the shows apparently dies of an accident, but the liaison at the sponsor's corporate headquarters is uneasy, and hires Stoner to investigate. Buckle your seat belts, for Stoner's efforts turn up some pretty ugly pictures beneath the sun-baked rocks in L.A. This is fast-paced P.I. stuff, even if Stoner is the only character in the book one can like.

Fans of Ed McBain's 87th Precinct novels needn't be told that the latest, **Ice**, has recently been published in paperback (Avon Books, \$2.95, 317 pp.). The overworked cops have their hands full—as always—and Carella isn't all that keen to take on the homicide investigation of a beautiful young Broadway chorus dancer who's been shot outside her apartment. There's not much choice, however; ballistics has identified the murder weapon as the same one that "iced" a smalltime junkie who *did* die in Carella's territory. So begins the search for the link between the "gypsy" and the addict—with some surprising twists and an unexpected conclusion. This is the kind of solid, sure-footed police procedural fare that gives that special sub-genre its good name.

Perennial Library has reprinted V.C. Clinton-Baddeley's **To Study a Long Silence**, written in 1972 (\$2.95, 192 pp.). The protagonist is R.V. Davie, a retired don and *commedia dell'arte* enthusiast, whose hobby lures him to a student production at the Winston School of Dramatic Art in a northern London suburb. An unobtrusive man and a keen observer, Davie has already sorted out some of the backstage dramas before the production begins. But his idle observations become vital clues when one of the students is murdered during the show—and there is no one without an ironclad alibi. A quiet, solid puzzler, perfect fireside reading.





Hero pursued by villains in *Cloak and Dagger*.

# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



**F**rom watching television action shows, today's children are knowledgeable about such adult activities as industrial espionage, car chases, secret weapons, and violence, all of which figure in **Cloak and Dagger**. This past summer, a seven-year-old St. Louis girl named Erin Hall pulled her four-year-old brother out of the family car after it had plunged off the highway and overturned. She then climbed a twenty foot embankment and flagged down a passing driver to bring help for her parents, who were still trapped in the car. She knew that she had to work fast, for as she explained, "I was afraid the car would catch on fire, because on all the shows on TV, that's what they do."

Kim, the blonde heroine of *Cloak and Dagger*, seems to be

just the age of young Erin, and looks very much like her. The heroine's neighbor and playmate is a boy of about eleven. When he stumbles on a murder, no adult will believe his report—for reasons that every child and former child will recognize. The corpus delicti having been spirited away, young Davey Osborne's story just sounds too much like overheated childhood fantasy to be taken seriously. Nor is his credibility improved by the fact that he does live a vivid fantasy life full of espionage and murder.

The espionage in the movie has to do with a video-game tape that falls into Davey's hands. It doesn't take him long to guess why the sinister men who begin to follow him want it back. After all, he has probably seen *The Amateur* and *War Games* (both of which have

been reviewed in this space) in addition to all those TV dramas. Just start to play one of these tapes and you will eventually uncover some kind of secret plan—in this case the design for a new American fighter plane. Of all people in the world, Davey's father should be concerned, since he is in the Air Force. But he just won't listen.

Luckily, though, Davey has a companion and guide visible only to himself. This is Jack Flack. Dressed in a uniform of no identifiable type, Flack gives the appearance of the mercenaries pictured in *Soldier of Fortune* magazine. The role is played with a swaggering but gentle dash by Dabney Coleman, who also plays Davey's widowed father. The psychological point that Davey's fantasies are really about the father who discourages them is a bit hackneyed, but this movie has a nice feeling for childhood that tends to disarm criticism.

Teenagers may feel too sophisticated to watch a movie about kids, but older moviegoers will appreciate finding one that is both appropriate for youngsters and pleasurable for themselves. The situation, after all, is very much that of the in-

nocent bystander who finds himself enmeshed in dangerous intrigue in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and other Hitchcock movies (as well as in Eric Ambler novels).

In the adult version of the innocent bystander story, the perfectly ordinary person drawn into the web of intrigue often turns out to suffer from a previously unimportant vulnerability. This may be an excess of suspicion, or credulity, or some such physical problem as vertigo that suddenly proves to be crucial. Davey and his friend Kim's vulnerable point is simply that they are children. Therefore, they are afflicted with such handicaps as not being listened to, or being able to travel about only with their bus passes. And of course they can never have recourse to physical strength.

In *Cloak and Dagger*, the fantasy figure of Jack Flack seems to provide the way out, but the children are really the heroes. Jack merely stands for all the TV action dramas studied by Erin Hall of St. Louis and Davey Osborne of *Cloak and Dagger*. Davey and Kim, played by Henry Thomas and Christina Nigra, give top-notch performances.

# THE STORY THAT WON



Arthur Tress

The June Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by William Callaway Geer of West Valley City, Utah. Honorable mentions go to J. Hanselman of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; Susan Neal of Battle Creek, Michigan; Brenda Tribble of Wise, Virginia; James H. Mills of Newton, Iowa; Addison Scott of Ardmore, Oklahoma; Richard Ciciarelli of Phelps, New York; Buddy Garrett of Mt. Home, Indiana; Ann Kruse Bowersox of Bourbon, Missouri; Samantha Allen of Gormley, Canada; Jack Van Riper of Vernon, Michigan; Irene Hayse of Rapid City, S. Dakota.

## CLEAN SWEEP by William Callaway Geer

The bank robbers leaped to their feet, guns at the ready, when the cabin door opened. A weather-beaten old man in peacoat and pith helmet shuffled in, dragging a broom. Chandler and his companion relaxed and lowered their pistols.

"Did you sweep out all the tracks?" asked Chandler.

The old man glanced anxiously at his wife before nodding his head affirmatively.

"Good," said Chandler. "Now, let's get some sleep."

They tied up the old couple and bedded down for the night. It was nearly mid-morning when Chandler awoke. He freed the old woman and told her to make coffee. "We'll be out of here soon," he said. "As soon as our friends get here, we'll . . ."

Suddenly, it was as though a hurricane hit the house. Both doors flew open. Glass from the windows sprayed into the cabin and a loud voice shouted, "Freeze! Police officers!"

Chandler found himself staring into the muzzle of a shotgun held by a very determined looking police officer.

"You're under arrest!" said the officer.

"How . . . how did you find us?" stammered Chandler.

The officer smiled. "This little stretch of sand is a very popular lovers' lane. When the local patrolman passed by early this morning, he noticed that *there was not one track leading down here from the highway*. He got suspicious and called in."

The old man's weathered face was expressionless, but as Chandler was being led away, he thought he caught a hint of laughter in the watery blue eyes.

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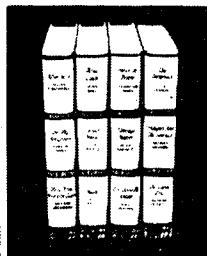
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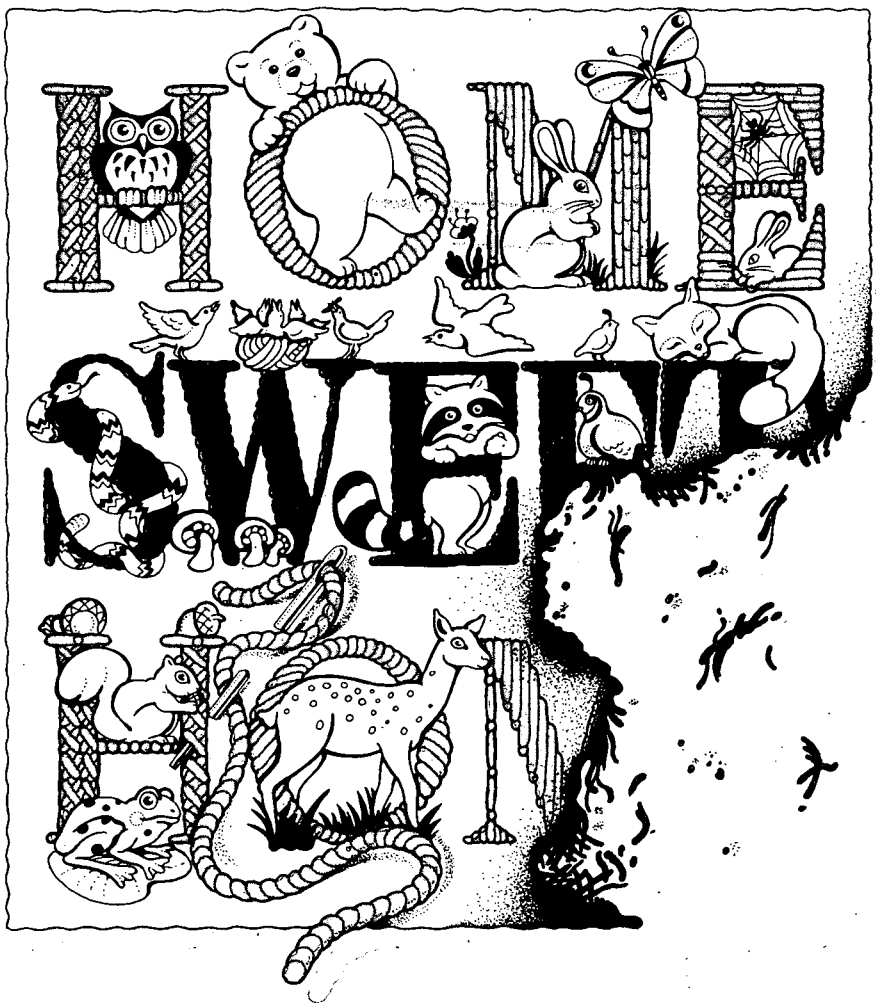
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